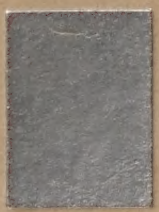
GLIMPSES OF THE BARREN LANDS

By

CAPTAIN THIERRY MALLET



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CAPTAIN THIERRY MALLET

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Acknowledgment is made to The Atlantic Monthly for permission to reprint four of the stories in this volume. They are: "Glimpses of the Barren Lands", which appeared in The Atlantic Monthly under the title of "A Frozen Diary"; "My Friend Kakoot"; "Furs and Traders", and "When the Caribou Failed."

SEVERAL years ago the patrons of Revillon Frères gave such a kind reception to my little book, "Plain Tales of the North," that I have been tempted to offer them, this year, a second small volume.

For twenty years it has been my privilege to spend a part of each year inspecting the Revillon Frères fur trading-posts. Each of the seven stories in "Glimpses of the Barren Lands" is a true episode of the Far North.

CAPTAIN THIERRY MALLET
President

REVILLON FRÈRES
684 Fifth Avenue, New York

GLIMPSES OF THE BARREN LANDS

AND THE NOISE OF THEIR HOOFS AND THE BREATHING OF THEIR LUNGS SOUNDED LIKE FAR-AWAY THUNDER.

I

OUR camp had been pitched at the foot of a great, bleak, ragged hill, a few feet from the swirling waters of the Kazan River. The two small green tents, pegged down tight with heavy rocks, shivered and rippled under the faint touch of the northern breeze. A thin wisp of smoke rose from the embers of the fire.

Eleven o'clock, and the sun had just set under a threatening bank of clouds far away to the northwest. It was the last day of June and daylight still. But the whole country seemed bathed in gray, boulders, moss, sand, even the few willow shrubs scattered far apart in the hollows of the hills. Half a mile away, upstream, the caribou-skin topeks of an Eskimo settlement, fading away amid the background, were hardly visible to the eye.

Three small gray specks could be seen moving slowly above our camp. Human shapes, but so puny, so insignificant-looking against the wild rocky side of that immense hill! Bending down, then straightening up, they seemed to totter aimlessly through the chaos of stone, searching for some hidden treasure.

Curiosity, or perhaps a touch of loneliness, suddenly moved me to leave camp and join those three forlorn figures so far away above me near the sky line.

Slowly I made my way along the steep incline, following at first the bed of a dried-up stream. Little by little the river sank beneath me, while the breeze, increasing in strength, whistled past, lashing and stinging my face and hands. I had lost sight momentarily of the three diminutive figures which had lured me on to these heights. After a while a reindeer trail enabled me to leave the coulee and led me again in the right direction, through a gigantic mass of granite which the frost of thousands of years had plucked from the summit of the hill and hurled hundreds of feet below.

At last I was able to reach the other side of the avalanche of rocks and suddenly emerged comparatively in the open, on the brim of a slight depression at the bottom of which a few dead willow bushes showed their bleached branches above the stones and the gray moss. There I found the three silent figures huddled close together, gathering, one by one, the twigs of the precious wood. Two little girls, nine or ten years old, so small, so helpless, and an aged woman, so old, so frail, that my first thought was to marvel at the idea of their being able to climb so far from their camp to that lonely spot.

An Eskimo great-grandmother and her two great-granddaughters, all three contributing their share to the

support of the tribe. Intent on their work, or most probably too shy to look up at the strange white man whom, until then, they had only seen at a distance, they gave me full opportunity to watch them.

All were dressed alike, in boots, trousers, and coats of caribou skin. The children wore little round leather caps reaching far over their ears, the crown decorated with beadwork designs. One of them carried on the wrist, as a bracelet, a narrow strip of bright red flannel. Their faces were round and healthy, the skin sunburned to a dark copper color, but their cheeks showed a tinge of blood which gave them, under the tan, a peculiar complexion like the color of a ripe plum. Their little hands were bare and black, the scratches caused by the dead twigs showing plainly in white, while their fingers seemed cramped with the cold.

The old woman was bareheaded, quite bald at the top of the head, with long wisps of gray hair waving in the wind. The skin of her neck and face had turned black, dried up like an old piece of parchment. Her cheeks were sunken and her cheek bones protruded horribly. Her open mouth showed bare gums, for her teeth were all gone, and her throat, thin and bare as a vulture's neck, showed the muscles like cords. Her hands were as thin as the hands of a skeleton, the tip of each finger curved in like a claw. Her eyes, once black, now light gray, remained half closed, deep down in their sockets.

She was stone blind.

Squatting on her heels, she held, spread in front of her, a small reindeer skin. As soon as the children dropped a branch beside her, she felt for it gropingly; then, her hands closing on it greedily, like talons, she would break it into small pieces, a few inches long, which she carefully placed on the mat at her feet.

Both little girls, while searching diligently through the clumps of dead willows for what they could break off and carry away, kept absolutely silent. Not only did they never call to one another when one of them needed help, but they seemed to watch each other intently whenever they could. Now and then, one of them would hit the ground two or three times with the flat of her hand. If the other had her head turned away at the time, she appeared to be startled and always wheeled round to look. Then both children would make funny little motions with their hands at one another.

The little girls were deaf and dumb.

After a while they had gathered all the wood the reindeer skin could contain. Then the children went up to the old woman and conveyed to her the idea that it was time to go home. One of them took her hands in hers and guided them to two corners of the mat, while the other tapped her gently on the shoulder.

The old, old woman understood. Slowly and carefully she tied up the four corners of the caribou skin over the

twigs, silently watched by the little girls. Groaning, she rose to her feet, tottering with weakness and old age, and with a great effort swung the small bundle over her back. Then one little girl took her by the hand, while the other, standing behind, grasped the tail of her caribou coat. Slowly, very slowly, step by step they went their way, following a reindeer trail around rocks, over stones, down, down the hill, straight toward their camp, the old woman carrying painfully for the young, the deaf and dumb leading and steering safely the blind.

II

Dawn. The sun had hardly set when once more it flashed above the horizon, for we were still at the beginning of July. From the top of a hill where I had been lying, watching the country, the Barren Lands stretched northward indefinitely. Not a tree in sight. Rocks, more rocks. Huge plateaus covered with moss, then lakes—small ones, large ones, in every direction, a hundred lakes, all blue, gleaming in the sunshine. Exactly in front of me to the north, on the other side of a deep hollow shaped like a crater, a long narrow ledge of sand ran lengthways, forming the top of another hill only a few feet lower than mine. In a straight line, barely forty yards separated the two spots. Sheltered from the northwest wind behind a cairn of stones erected there by some roaming Eskimo hunter, I was completely hidden.

Suddenly something caught the corner of my right eye as I watched the distant shores of a lake to my left. A lone wolf, a great big Arctic wolf, had silently appeared on the ridge and was standing, facing me, absolutely unconscious of my presence.

Scarcely daring to breathe, rigid, motionless, I watched the huge beast in the full glory of his strength and beauty. Pure white except for a black streak running from the forehead down the neck and the middle of the back to the end of the tail, I judged him to weigh one hundred and fifty pounds and to be twice the size of a very large dog. Head erect, ears pointed, his tail curved down, the brush only an inch or so from the ground, he calmly gazed around him. His eyes had a bright gold tinge in them. They rested a second on the top of the cairn above my head, then swept farther away, past me, to the right.

After that, slowly he lowered his head, the muscles playing round his neck and shoulders, and sniffed disdainfully at the sand at his feet. Raising his head again swiftly, he pointed his muzzle straight up to the sky and began to howl. First a deep, low howl coming from far down his throat, then rising and rising until it reached a shrill, haunting note, ending abruptly in a short, sharp cry. Twice again, without moving from where he stood, he sent out that long, nerve-racking call.

Then—something in me snapped. I could not stand the tension any longer. I felt that I had to show myself.

I refused to be peering any more through the crack between two stones. I wanted that wolf to see me. I wanted to be face to face with him.

Without a noise, in one movement I rose to my full height, stepping away from my hiding place. The wolf flinched slightly, his legs bending a little under him. The hair on the crest of his neck rose, his ears flattened back, and he bared his teeth in a noiseless snarl. For the space of a second, perhaps two, he remained there, looking straight at me. Then, with a mighty sweep of his legs, his body straightened like a bow. He flung himself backward over the ridge and disappeared like a ghost, without making a sound.

III

Noon. Our canoe swept round a sharp curve of the river, rode the last waves of the rapids, and shot into the backwater under a high rocky bank, in the lee of a hill.

A family of Eskimos watched us land. They were traveling upstream and had stopped there to "make fire" among a few willow trees.

My men started collecting sufficient firewood to boil a kettle of tea, and the natives helped them, hoping to share our meal. I strolled away, examining the Eskimos' outfit, strewn on the shore. Six husky dogs, each tied to a rock by the chain of a fox trap, rose, cringing and snarling, as I passed them. A kayak stood upright against a

boulder. An old wooden canoe was fastened to the bank by a long rope of reindeer hide. A handful of pemmican was thrown carelessly on the ground, while beside it lay a large platter made of old castaway planking, containing a few sundried fish.

Forty feet away, upstream, a mass of loose rocks strewn on the bank caught my eye. But what really attracted my attention was a patch of color amid the gray of the stones.

I approached to find, sitting in a little hollow between two boulders, a tiny little girl. She was about four years old. Dressed in caribou hide, with coat, trousers, and boots, she was bareheaded except for a thick band of native copper which encircled her forehead just above the eyes. Her mother had tied round her fat little "tummy" a wide strip of bright red stroud, in the form of a sash. That was what I had seen from the camp. The child was busy playing with something white which she was rolling back and forth on a little flat rock between her knees. It reminded me of the movement of an Indian squaw crushing barley with a round stone. The child looked up and gazed at me thoughtfully for a few seconds. Her little round dark face was shining and her eyes were very black and serious between the slanting eyelids. Then, satisfied, she looked down again and went on with her game, crooning to herself in baby Husky which sounded very weird.

At that moment her mother called out sharply from

the camp fire. Obediently she rose and toddled away, leaving her toy behind her.

I stooped and picked it up. It was a human skull, a very, very old one, covered with mildew. Moss had crept into the sockets of the eyes and inside the cranium. I turned it round and round in my hands, wondering a little at the strangeness of my discovery, when I remembered the mass of loose stones. At a glance I recognized a very old grave. Eskimos bury their dead on the surface of the ground, for no one can dig down more than a foot or so without finding rock or ice. I realized that the mound of stones which had been piled so long ago over the body had fallen apart, and that the baby girl, playing about, must have seen the skull between some of the stones and picked it up.

Just as I was going to throw it away I saw something dark on the forehead. Looking closer, I found that it was a large round lead bullet which had just pierced the forehead from the inside, remaining wedged into the bone. Turning the skull once more, I also found, at the base, the hole which it had made going in. With some effort I extracted the bullet with my knife. It was a round ball, of an unknown calibre. No firearm dating as far back as half a century had ever fired it. The little girl had been playing with the skull of an Eskimo who had been shot, —possibly a direct ancestor of hers, who knows?—and not only shot, but plainly murdered from behind.

IV

We had been wind-bound for two days. Twice we had attempted to get out on Yathkyed Lake; twice we had been forced to turn round, with water pouring in over the gunwales of our canoe, and to seek shelter in the river. Finally we gave it up and pitched our camp a mile or so upstream, in the lee of a rock on the edge of a small sandy cove, where the river narrowed to barely one hundred yards.

On the other side of the water the country rose slightly, and extended for miles and miles without a tree, a shrub, or a rock to relieve its appalling monotony. Just a desert of gray moss, rolling in waves away from us, as far as the eye could see.

We were sitting round a little fire which we constantly fed with small dry twigs picked up here and there on the beach, when we saw across the river, on the horizon, a small yellow streak which seemed to be moving toward us. It looked exactly like a huge caterpillar creeping on the ground. We watched it intently. The yellow streak, little by little, grew in length and width until suddenly, in a second, it spread into a large spot, which, widening and widening on either side, still kept moving in our direction. It reminded me then of a swarm of locusts, such as one sees in South America, spreading over the fields after dropping to earth in a cloud from the sky.

In a few minutes the yellow patch had grown to such a size that we realized, far as we were from it, that it covered many acres. After that we began to see in the mass of yellow hundreds and thousands of tiny dots which moved individually. Then we knew what it was. It was a great herd of reindeer, the Barren Land caribou, migrating south.

Spellbound, we remained beside our camp fire, watching probably the most stupendous sight of wild game in North America since the bygone days of the buffalo.

On and on the horde came, straight for the narrows of the river where we were camped. While the flanks of the herd stretched irregularly a mile or so on each side of the head, the latter remained plainly pointed in the same direction. One felt instinctively the unswerving leadership which governed that immense multitude. For two hours we sat there, looking and looking, until the caribou were only a few yards from the water's edge, right across the river from where we were.

An old doe, nearly white, led by twenty lengths; then came three or four full-grown bucks, walking side by side. After them started a column of animals of all sizes and descriptions. That column widened like a fan until it lost itself on either side of a swarm of caribou, so closely packed together that acres and acres of gray moss were completely hidden by their moving bodies. And the noise

of their hoofs and the breathing of their lungs sounded like far-away thunder.

When the old doe reached the water, she stopped. The bucks joined her on either side. Little by little, right and left, thousands of animals lined the bank for over a mile. Behind them thousands more, which could not make their way through the closed ranks in front of them, stopped. Then all their heads went up, bucks, does, yearlings, fawns, and, motionless, they looked at the Kazan River. Not a sound could be heard. My eyes ached under the strain. Beside me I could feel one of my Indians trembling like a leaf in his excitement. I started counting and reached three thousand. Then I gave it up. There were too many.

After what seemed to us an interminable pause, the leading doe and the big bucks moved forward. Unhesitatingly they walked slowly down the bank, took to the water, and started to swim across, straight for our little sandy cove.

In an instant the whole herd had moved, and with a roar of clattering hoofs, rolling stones, and churning waters, all the animals were pouring down the bank and breasting the icy current until the river foamed. On and on they came, swimming madly to the nearest point of the opposite shore. Nothing could stop them. Nothing could make them swerve.

As soon as they landed they raced up the bank, giving

way to the next ones behind them. We were standing up, then, behind our fire. The first ones saw us from the water, but they never changed their direction until they touched bottom. Then they scattered slightly on either side, giving us room. The next ones followed suit. And for what seemed to us an eternity we were surrounded by a sea of caribou galloping madly inland.

Finally the last one went by, a very small fawn, his mouth open and his tongue hanging out. Then silence reigned supreme again. The Barren Lands resumed their aspect of utter desolation. And nothing was left to show that the great herd of caribou had passed, save countless tracks on the sand and millions of gray hairs floating down the river to the sea.

V

We were waiting for two Eskimo dog trains to haul us across Hekwa-Leekwa Lake. It was the tenth of July and the ice of the lake was still solid, lying unbroken from shore to shore. Eighty miles long, twenty-five miles wide, it was still sleeping under its white winter covering. Around it, on land, it was already summer, with little flowers showing their heads between the stones, stray willow clumps waving their new green leaves in the breeze, and countless birds singing and flitting about beside their nests. Walking inland, I decided to climb the highest hill which could be seen in those parts. It rose about three

miles from the river and lake and towered above the surrounding country, very much in the shape of a pyramid.

The weather was bright and clear and the heat of the sun radiated from the rocks, but every puff of wind blowing over the ice of the lake was like the frozen breath of the Arctic itself.

I toiled slowly up and up the steep incline, zigzagging among boulders and through coulees of loose stones, watching the horizon receding gradually from me, obeying unconsciously the call which comes to all white men in the wilderness and which bids them go on and on, through forests, up or down rivers, across lakes, over mountains, searching, ever searching for something new.

I reached the summit at last,—just a few square feet of level ground,—and there I found an Eskimo grave. Five feet high, seven feet long, it was entirely made out of loose rocks which had been brought up there by hand, one by one, and neatly piled one on top of the other, over the dead. Thus it formed a solid block on which, one would think, neither weather nor time could make the slightest impression. Forming part of the landscape itself, that grave seemed to be there for all eternity.

At the head of it, a few feet away, a spear stood erect, stuck deep in the ground and solidly wedged in at the base between heavy rocks. The point was of native copper. From it fluttered, in rags, the remains of a deerskin coat.

At the foot lay, side by side, a kayak with its paddle

and harpoon and a twenty-foot sleigh with its set of dog harness and a snow knife. Both kayak and sleigh were held down by stones carefully placed along their entire length.

On the grave itself I found a rifle, a small kettle with a handful of tea leaves inside, a little wooden box containing ten cartridges, a pipe, a plug of tobacco, matches, a knife, a small telescope, and a neatly coiled rawhide belt. One could see that everything had been lying there a few weeks only. No inscription of any sort. But the weapons showed that it was a man who had been buried in that lonely spot.

As I leaned against the grave, my eyes wandered around. I tried to picture to myself the faithful companions of the deceased hunter struggling up that hill, bearing on their shoulders the rigid body of their dead; their search for those hundreds of rocks, and the work of piling them, one by one, for hours and hours, until the mound was able to defy the efforts of the wild animals and the incessant pressure of the years to come; finally the long descent to the camp, to bring up again, one by one, the precious belongings of the deceased.

To me, there alone, leaning on that grave on the top of that immense hill, the whole undertaking seemed incredible. The more I thought, the more I marveled, searching for the motive which had prompted those natives, not only to choose that almost inaccessible spot

to lay their dead at rest, but to abandon unhesitatingly on his grave that wealth of articles which I knew represented an immense value to them, in their constant bitter struggle for mere existence.

Pagans they were—pagans they still remain. Although they have a certain code to which they are faithful, unlike the old Indians they have no form of worship. Still that grave, those weapons, those articles of daily use, of absolute necessity, carefully laid near the body from which the spirit has just flown—all these must have had a meaning, must prove that somewhere in the innermost part of their hearts there exists a hope, a belief in after life, something to look forward to when the last day comes.

And while I thought those thoughts I pulled out my pipe and filled it slowly. It was time for me to go; the icy wind from the lake made me shudder with cold. As I turned for a last look at the grave, my eyes fell on the little wooden box. Then an impulse struck me. I opened the box, took a handful of tobacco out of my pouch, and laid it carefully inside, closing the lid securely.

VI

The long, long trail was nearly over as far as the Barren Lands were concerned. We were on Ennadai Lake, halfway across already, and our canoe ploughed its way through water as still as a mirror.

It was August, and one already felt the unmistakable touch of the fall. Long strings of duck were flying in all directions, while on land we could see small herds of caribou already migrating to the South. Everything was still. The splash of our paddles as they dipped into the clear water of the lake seemed all out of proportion to the dead silence which surrounded us, while our voices brought out long muffled echoes from the nearest hills.

Hour after hour we glided on, intent on reaching the end of the lake before dark. Little by little the sun went down behind us. Just before sunset we went through the last narrows and entered the southern bay into which the Kazan River flows. And then suddenly the first trees since we had entered the Barren Lands two months before came into view. The rays of the dying sun fell, slanting, on their green branches, and to our tired eyes the first spruces and tamaracks of the Canadian forest seemed to welcome us home.

Instinctively we stopped paddling, letting our canoe drift slowly forward, while we looked back for the last time on the bleak northern land through which we had toiled for weeks.

The sun was setting, like a huge ball of fire, and the lake far away to the north was beginning to flame. Around us the water had lost its tinge of blue, streaks of purple appearing here and there on its glassy surface. The hills

glowed pink where they faced the sunset, while the other side was lost in deep shadows.

A mile away from us, on the extreme southern point of a ridge of rocks, four human figures stood motionless, silhouetted black against the crimson of the sky. The last Eskimos of the Barren Lands, watching us go south toward the unknown country of plenty, where lives the white man!

From where I sat in my canoe I sent them a mute good-bye. Those four tiny dots appeared to me very forlorn and pathetic.

There they were, at the edge of their native land, but looking south, as if straining for something which was not theirs to have. To me it looked as if they realized that they could come up to where they were but no farther, that an unwritten law forbade them to follow our footsteps, and that the gates of Paradise, the gates of the rich Country of Trees, were closed to them forever.

THE BATTLE OF THE DRUMS

THEN THE STARS CAME OUT, ONE BY ONE, AND IT WAS NIGHT.

II

"DRUM—tap—tap drum," the unmistakable throb of an Indian drum far away somewhere in the darkness.

It was night, a dark gray northern night in the fall. A tinge of frost was in the air. The lake lay unruffled at my feet, like an immense sheet of glass, streaked in the center by the pale light of the full moon. Low down on the horizon, to the west, the northern lights shimmered faintly. Overhead, the stars glittered, bright and cold. Not a breath of air anywhere. The smoke of my camp fire rose in a straight gray column, rigid like a mast, mounting, mounting, until it disappeared suddenly in the night far above.

On the other side of the lake, the country spread itself in a confused mass of rolling hills, while, here and there, a boulder or a clump of spruce trees stood out like dark shadows against the sky.

Behind me, to the North, the first undulating waves of the Barren Lands stretched far away, like an immense desert towards the Arctic.

Everywhere, silence. Not a sigh from the wind. Not a splash on the lake. Not even the cry of a night bird on the wing.

I had been sitting there, alone, listening, when suddenly, an Indian drum started throbbing in the distance.

Slowly, softly at first, each beat reached me at regular intervals. Then they waned, dying down gradually to hardly a sound, muffled, hollow, ending little by little in a steady murmuring drone. Later on, when that faint sound had lasted so long that I had nearly forgotten it, it swelled gently again, changing into a steady beat—beat—beat. This time, it throbbed clearer and clearer, then faster and faster, until it finally broke into a continuous roar which shattered the night and woke all the echoes in the hills, far away across the lake.

There I remained until dawn, hugging my camp fire and listening to that drum. It never stopped once, and I dreamed and pondered over that unknown Indian who, a mile away, bending over his taut caribou skin, was drumming in front of his tepee, under the northern skies, like his forbears had drummed, centuries ago, years and years before even the arrival of the first white man.

What were the man's thoughts, I wondered? What motive had he to drum there, alone, surrounded by his family and dogs, away from his tribe, far from the

trading station and the Catholic Mission which claimed him as their own? Was it loneliness, superstition, the last remains of a religion faintly remembered through his father who was born and reared a pagan? Or was it simply a matter of blind atavism which made him construct a drum, such as the one his ancestors had always made, and beat it under the stars, with the palm or the knuckles of his right hand, as soon as he lost sight of the log huts of the trading village to which he was supposed to belong?

There he was, one of the last survivors of the once mighty tribe of Denes or Chipewayans, bridging the gulf of centuries with a little drum. And my thoughts, over the camp fire, under the spell of the throbbing of his caribou hide, carried me further and further away, from my time.

I forgot that the buffaloes had been wiped out in the South, that the beavers were dwindling in the North, that, slowly but surely civilization was cutting down the last vast stretches of the Canadian wilderness. I forgot that the railways were forever pushing northward their arms of steel and that the day was in sight when there would be no place on this continent untainted by the touch of white men and when Indians and Eskimos would vanish.

I closed my eyes and imagined that the land of silent places still stretched unscathed from sea to sea. I

dreamed of all the Indian tribes as they used to be, with their thousands of hunters. I remembered all the tales of the past, translated to me during the last twenty years, around so many camp fires, from Labrador to Yukon.

And then I thought of the Battle of the Three Drums, as it was told to me, once, North of 59.

"Once upon a time, centuries ago, it was spring, early spring on Wahpeyoo Lake. The snow had left the ground but although the swift rivers were running clear of ice, the lake still remained frozen solidly from shore to shore.

"Ducks were already flying back from the South. The first flights of geese were honking their way North. One could hear the hoarse croaking of the ravens and the shrill calling and whistling of the jays. The swollen little creeks gurgled—spluttered and foamed, teeming with spawning fish. The bears, gaunt and famished after their winter's sleep, had left their dens to wander through the bush, feeding on roots, first, before going down to search the shallow waters at the edge of the rapids. Long strings of caribou plodded northward across the ice of the lake, the does hastening ahead so as to reach the heart of the Barren Lands in time to give birth to their fawns, the bucks loitering behind aimlessly, milling around when they saw anything to frighten them. The wolves had left the pack, seeking in

pairs a den for their young, and the foxes, at dawn, barked on the rocky ledges of the hills. The otters, forsaking their winter haunts, were swimming upstream while the beavers, abandoning their lodges, cruised about, searching for fresh trees to cut down.

"It was spring and the living was good. Game was plentiful. The days were already long. Traveling was easy on the glare ice of the lake.

"So thought Muskwa, the Cree, as he reached the southeast shore of Wahpeyoo Lake and pitched his tepee in the shelter of the wind, under a cluster of spruce trees.

"It was the first time that he had ever traveled so far to the northwest and he knew that no one of his people, who were hunting to the east of him, had ever seen that lake. He noted the islands far out in the frozen waters. He saw no other tracks but the ones of wild animals. He was content for himself and his family. In his restlessness, he had wanted new hunting grounds to roam in, alone, and believing that the Crees were the only people alive in these parts, he was certain to have found what he was seeking.

"A few miles farther west, along the same shore of the lake, it was also spring—and there also a man with his family appeared, this time coming from the west and heading east. His name was Kazaganeh and he belonged to the Chipewayan tribe. When he saw the lake, he decided to stop traveling. He was the first

of his people to reach that spot and he pitched his camp in the shelter of the wind, close to a huge rock. He did not know how far the land extended to the east and he had never heard of the Crees. He was proud at the thought that he was alone in that new country and life seemed good to him, for he knew that the hunting would be successful.

"An hour's walk to the north, in the center of the lake and right in the middle of the line formed by the two Indian camps pitched on the south shore, there rose a big island running from east to west. It was spring there also and from the far North, traveling on the ice, there also came a third man with his wife and children. His name was Yapuk and he was an Eskimo from the Sea. He was searching for wood to build a new sleigh and to make new spears, harpoons and kayak to hunt in. He had never been as far south in his life, and he thought that he had reached the end of the World.

"When he climbed on the top of the island, he saw on the south shore of the lake, the trees scattered among the hills, and he smiled happily. He had found what he wanted. He therefore pitched his camp, facing south, in the shelter of the wind, in the hollow of a little ravine.

"The rest of the day passed. The three men were busy in their respective camps. Meanwhile the women

cooked and the children played strange little games such as children still play the world over. The sleigh dogs, tied to pickets, lay curled up with the tip of their tail covering their nose but with their bright eyes opened, watching every move round the fire.

"Everything was quiet and peaceful. The ducks and the geese kept on winging their way northward and the herds of caribou still plodded across the lake. Slowly the sun began its downward course. Gradually it became redder and redder until it kissed the crest of the hills to the northwest. Splashes of pink appeared here and there on the ice. Then the whole lake flamed for a few minutes. After that the sun sinking more and more behind the land, disappeared entirely. Gradually the lake resumed its immaculate whiteness while the crimson on the horizon where the astre had vanished, changed into an orange shade which spread, mounting higher and higher until it reached the zenith. There it remained for a long time. Finally the dark blue of the sky seemed to creep down and little by little the vivid coloring died. Then the stars came out, one by one, and it was night.

"At that moment the three men who thought they were alone on Wahpeyoo Lake entered their tepees and each one brought out a drum.

"The Cree Indian's drum was small and made of moose hide. Its sound was sharp, high and clear.

"The Chipewayan's drum was bigger and covered with caribou skins. Its sound was grave and slightly muffled.

"The Eskimo's drum was the largest of all, made of sealskin and its sound was very deep and hollow.

"Each man, following the custom of his race, sat down beside his fire and started to drum. Absorbed in the sound, he tapped and tapped with open hand or closed knuckles, and, at first he did not notice that other drums than his own were throbbing in the darkness. When, suddenly he heard them, he stopped abruptly in astonishment and fear, and silence reigned supreme again.

"After a long time, from the north of the lake, on the island, there came one deep hollow boom, then a roll and another boom, like a question mark from the man of the Arctic. Instantly it was answered shrilly by the tap tap of the Cree drum, echoing sharply like the bark of an angry dog. Before the sound had died, the Chipewayan's drum joined its muffled throbbing to the other Indian's call. And from there on, each man, in a frenzy of excitement and rage, strove to drown the drumming of the two others and silence the two strange drums which dared to challenge the call of his own instrument.

"All night, the three drums boomed and rolled and throbbed in a continuous roar. All the echoes of the

hills answered. And the waves of sound spread over land and lake, waking up the birds and scattering the herds of caribou far away.

"When the sun rose at last, there was silence again. The two Indian drums had stopped as soon as the first rays had flashed above the horizon to the northeast but the big Eskimo drum had gone on, booming at long intervals insolently, for more than an hour afterwards.

"There was no hunting all that day. The three men remained in camp, alert, watching, their weapons ready. The women were frightened, and the children whispered to one another close to the fire, while the dogs sniffed the air, uneasily, and howled up to the sky.

"Then night came again. This time, each man gave the drum to his eldest man child and told him to drum. The Eskimo started, first, faintly. After that the Cree. Finally the Chipewayan. In a few minutes the rolling, north, east and west was continuous. Then, each man, seizing his weapons, left camp and vanished in the darkness, on the ice of the lake.

"The two Indians were armed with bow and arrows while the Eskimo had in his right hand a long spear, the point of which was in ivory with a fine copper head to it.

"The Cree and Chipewayan, stalking silently, made a straight line so as to get between each other and the Eskimo. The man from the Arctic advanced due south.

"Each man crept slowly, a few steps at a time. Clouds had come up from the east, the stars were hidden and it was dark. Meanwhile, the drums' call rolled above them, the throbbing increasing savagely as the time passed and each man child guessed that his father was on the point of facing his foes.

"Suddenly, the three warriors met. At a distance of twenty paces, their shadows loomed out of the darkness. The two Indians sank lower on the ice, bending their bows. The Eskimo rose to his full height lifting his spear. Before his arm had finished its sweep, there was a double twang of the bow strings and two arrows pierced his chest. He fell stone dead, face downwards on the ice. Then the two Indians swung, facing one another, each man striving desperately to feather his arrow first. Both bows rose, bent and straightened simultaneously. Two arrows flashed through the night and both men fell. Their limbs quivered for a few minutes. One of them groaned. Then both lay still.

"The night passed on. Slowly, the throbbing of the drums grew less, until it died down completely when the sun rose for the second time.

"From the flap of each tepee, the women who had been gazing across the lake since the first flash of dawn, saw three small dark specks motionless on the ice. And a long wail of grief rose from the three camps, for each

woman understood at a glance that the Battle of the Drums had been fought and lost.

"One after the other, the Eskimo first, then the Cree, then the Chipewayan, each woman, accompanied by her eldest man child and hauling her little hand sleigh toiled forth across the lake, picked up the body of her dead man and toiled back to her camp.

"That afternoon, before sundown, each woman buried her husband, the two Indian warriors being laid to rest in a deep grave in the sand on the top of a little hill, the Eskimo on the surface of the earth, under a huge pile of rocks—for such is the custom.

"A little later, when the wind had died down, when the smoke of each camp fire began to mount slowly, straight up to the sky, when the sun had set for the third time, there rose again the sound of the three drums. But this time, the throbbing was slow and very, very low and did not last long, for each man child was tired and frightened.

"And the next day, the three camps were deserted for there was no one on Wahpeyoo Lake.

"And from then on, the Crees, the Chipewayans and the Eskimos fought and killed each other each time they met. And the war between them went on and on for a long, long time, until the white man came and laid down his laws."

So went the legend!

SOME MEN I HAVE MET IN THE NORTH

I REMEMBER HOW HIS FACE
GLOWED IN THE SETTING SUN.

III

HAVE I reached the end of the long, long trail? I do not know. I hope I haven't yet!

Still, after twenty-three years of wanderings in the wilderness, North, far North, here I am in the grips of civilization again.

I am resting for a little while. But my thoughts go back, constantly, over all these years.

At times I try to travel back some of the miles of the weary, happy road. Today, closing my eyes, I am coaxing back to me the memories of some of the men I have met over there.

Old friends, passing acquaintances, white men, Indians, half-breeds, Eskimos. Men I have traveled with for years. Others among whom I chanced to be for a day or an hour. Men whose names and history I know like my own. Men whom I never knew at all, who just passed, at the bend of a river, traveling the opposite way but whose memory still clings to me after twenty odd years. Men who are still living and whom I hope to see again. Men who have long been dead. Men who, like me, have gone South. And men who have vanished completely, God only knows where, in the North.

I can see them all. One by one their faces have come out of the mist. I can hear their voices. I remember.

—Here is Father D... He was an "old time" Missionary—I mean by that that he had been North forty years when I met him, for the first time, eighteen years ago—He had never gone back to civilization since he had been sent to the wilderness. For forty years, he had lived a thousand miles "from any place." And when he started his job, all the Indians there were real pagans.

He had, I think, a very hard time of it, at first. But, little by little, he learned the language, built his Church and won the affection of the natives. It takes a real man to do all that, especially the latter.

As he often told me, he did not "begin with God." He started by looking after the physical side of the Indians. He took care of the sick, delivered women when they were in a bad way, mended broken limbs, dressed wounds, brought food during starvation times, introduced potatoes and taught how to plant them.

Then, gradually, he talked religion and, little by little, the Indians came to him to be baptized. They still kept to their drums and their beliefs but they reserved all that for when they were far away in the bush. When they reached the Mission, they were meek and mild and scrupulously religious. Many Indians today, for that matter, are no different! But several of their

old customs, including murder for one or another reason, were abolished. And Father D . . . had the right to be proud of the results of his work.

When I met him, he was over sixty years old. He weighed two hundred and twenty pounds and had a huge gray beard, down to his chest.

Born in France, in the south, he had retained all the qualities and faults of his race. He was always happy, very talkative, exceedingly hospitable and courteous and at all times, terribly excitable. I might add that he had a very quick temper.

His one and only passion was shooting, whether it was with a rifle or a shot gun. He had it in his blood, and when there was a chance of killing game, nothing on earth—or heaven—could stop him.

I have been told by many (but I wasn't there to see it) that one spring morning he was holding Mass in his little wooden Church when the first geese arrived, "honking their way" northward, right over the settlement.

Father D . . . heard them. So did every member of the congregation. Furthermore, every papoose, too young to attend Church but old enough to sit up and take notice, had started "calling the birds". The racket was deafening, for the geese, tired and hungry, were "honking" back and circling, looking for a spot to light.

Flesh and blood could not stand it! With a muttered word or two, Father D . . . suddenly made a dash for the

door, followed by the entire congregation. Two minutes later, there he was, outside of the Church, bareheaded, shooting merrily away, at the head of a small company of parishioners who, of course, were doing likewise.

The joke is that Father D . . . was the world's worst shot. He was nearsighted, very fat, short in the arms and, as I have said before, very excitable. He couldn't see very well and he couldn't aim. He, also, always pressed the trigger too soon. I do not think he could have hit a hay stack at thirty yards with any kind of a firearm. But as there were no hay stacks in his part of the world, we never had the occasion to try.

I remember going duck shooting with him, several times, in the early fall, when the birds were still young, slow to rise and quite tame. A whole string would "flap up" from the reeds right under the bow of his canoe. Father D . . . , lurching up to his feet, would let go with both barrels. Not a feather in the air!

"I hit that one. I hit that one. Watch him. He's going to fall."

Each duck, scatheless, would gather speed and disappear over the spruce tops.

Then Father D . . . would catch my eye. He knew that I knew. So he would grin sheepishly and say: "Maybe I did miss this time!" Dear Father D . . . ! He could not have told a lie, even if he had tried to.

He was quick tempered. I have already said so. We went out moose shooting once, in the early spring. Just he and I. Through sheer good luck, we happened to find fresh tracks, a bull and two cows. We started tracking at once, through a thickly wooded country.

Father D . . . , of course, had his cassock on. He never discarded it, although he used to pin it round his waist with enormous safety pins when the going was really bad. He wore also a large black sash and inside the sash a brass crucifix which must have been eighteen inches long and weighed two or three pounds.

In a little while, we got to be very close to the moose. In fact, we could plainly hear them thrashing in a small clearing ahead of us. The wind was in our favor. We started crawling in earnest, foot by foot.

Father D . . . was behind me. I could hear him breathing heavily. It was a hard job for him to worm himself on his stomach with his tremendous weight. Several times, I turned my head backwards and looked at him, motioning, imploring him to be more silent. Each time he looked up at me, his crimson face bathed in perspiration, his beard full of dead leaves, and grinned back at me in a reassuring manner.

We finally reached the edge of the clearing. I could just see the hind legs of one moose. Suddenly, a metallic bang shattered the silence. It was Father D . . . who had hit a rock with his crucifix.

Like a flash, the three moose lunged forward and disappeared in the bush. Leaping up to my knees, quickly, I raised my rifle but there was nothing to aim at. Just a noise of galloping hoofs and broken twigs, dwindling away in the distance. Then, silence!

I turned round disgustedly. There was Father D . . . sitting on the ground, purple with rage. He had snatched the crucifix from his belt and was looking at it intently.

Was he going to hurl it away in the bush in one mad gesture of anger? His eyes caught mine. I never saw any human expression change so quickly. A look of utter shame crept into his face. He hung his head down like a child, while his lips muttered something. Then, he rose to his feet, put back the crucifix in its place and busied himself brushing his clothes as if his life depended upon it.

The last time I saw Father D . . . was just before the war. I was traveling South in a great hurry. I passed his Mission in the early afternoon. I did not want to pitch camp yet but I had to "stop and visit."

After I had been in the parlor a few minutes, I asked him for a drink—a real drink. When one has been on tea—four or five times a day—for four months, one sometime gets an idea of that kind.

"But I haven't got a thing to drink—dans tout le presbytère—my son. Not a thing. Not a drop."

Well! I insisted, just for the fun of it, as I knew him so well. Finally Father D . . . got up. I think his eyes were

smiling but he never said a word. In a few minutes he came back with a small bottle in his hand.

"This is Mass wine, mon fils. Maybe we can have one little glass of it. Just one glass. It isn't bad wine. I made it myself."

Far from me the idea of passing judgment, fourteen years later, on Father D. . . 's wine. But I remember how he used to make it. With dried raisins! And it was hard liquor at that! I might say, though, that after a regime of tea four times a day, it had a certain flavor of its own which no one could despise.

We each drank our little glass—slowly—carefully, then we had another. In the end we finished the bottle. It was a small one—really a very small one!

Then, it was time for me to say good-bye. Father D . . . accompanied me to the river bank where my two Indians were waiting patiently in the canoe.

I can see him now, plainly. He was a little out of breath and he held his cassock with both hands, like a skirt, for the ground was very muddy. The crucifix, in his belt, was shining in the sun.

"A vous revoir," he said, "à vous revoir."

I never saw him again. Six years later, after the war, I came back and saw his grave, close to the little wooden Church. He had died a year before from pneumonia contracted in the middle of winter, while tending a sick Indian somewhere in the bush.

—There was K . . . He was a German from the old country. Nobody knows why and when he drifted North. First he reached the end of the railway. Then he took to the bush. Each year, he went farther and farther away. Finally he reached the Barren Lands and married an Eskimo woman.

By "marriage" I mean that he bought her from her parents with her consent and took her away to his camp that very day. One must consider that the nearest priest was one thousand miles away. Furthermore K . . . was a Protestant and the Eskimo a perfect heathen. So I suppose he had some kind of an excuse.

He was a small man, very dark, quick on his feet like an alley cat. Cold, hunger, bad food, raw meat, nothing ever seemed to make any impression on him. He learned the language of the natives in a surprisingly short time. After a bit, he started white fox trapping in earnest.

At first, he did not do so well. In fact, he barely made both ends meet and was in debt at the fur trading outpost four hundred miles south from where he lived "on the edge of the trees."

A baby came. He called it "Carl" although it was a girl. Then, one winter, the white foxes returned in droves. He killed a large number and traded in several hundred from his wife's relations and friends.

When the ice broke up, he decided to go South, to civilization, and sell his furs there. No more fur trading sta-

tion for him. He wanted cash and he was ready to bring his own outfit back with him, for the next hunting season, even if he had to transport it and portage it himself fourteen hundred miles.

When the Eskimo wife heard of the trip, she did not object. Women in the Arctic are taught to be very obedient. But she asked him if she could take with her her sister who was a widow and who also had a little child. K . . . was willing!

Two months later, he reached the railway with his two Eskimo women, the two babies, and some four hundred white fox skins, neatly packed in forty canvas bales.

The little frontier town of L— was not worth while stopping at. He took the first train for the South, having purchased the only drawing room, and piled in the two Eskimo women who were still wearing their caribou pants and boots.

Their departure from L— was an event. The entire population turned out to watch. The two Eskimo women were very nervous. They had never seen an electric light, a horse, a stone house or a white woman, and when they saw the train and its engine, they showed signs of panic. But K . . . just threw them in with a torrent of unintelligible "Husky" words — and the family was whisked away.

When they finally reached their destination, K . . . at first had a lot of trouble to find a hotel which was willing

to take them in. But he finally did, after giving a lot of explanations, and it wasn't a bad hotel at that!

He sold his four hundred odd white foxes. I don't remember how much. But they must have averaged thirty-five dollars apiece. Then—he started buying—like a drunken sailor, in all the stores in town. The women got everything they fancied, dresses, boots, hats, a wrist watch, a gramophone, an alarm clock, a pair of gloves, sunshades. The two babies were fitted out with every possible garment a white child could wear. Then K . . . purchased his own stock of merchandise for the next winter's hunting, and a brand new Ford which he shipped by rail to L—.

A month or so later, I met him going down the river. He had bought a huge flat boat (what the French Canadians call a bateau). Not only had he put on board his wife, her sister, the two babies, the entire stock of merchandise, which amounted to several tons, but also the Ford. He had, in some way, taken the motor out and was using it to propel the boat downstream. He had three hired Indians to help him.

I shall never forget our astonishment when, suddenly, we saw that strange craft coming round the bend of the river, straight for us. We were in a nineteen foot canoe and paddling swiftly against a strong current.

K . . . 's flat boat loomed up like a floating tank.

The Ford was for'ard, placed sidewise, each end over-

hanging the gun'ales. Beside it were the three Indians. The general merchandise was behind, piled up in a huge heap, ten feet high, on the top of which was a new white baby carriage. Then came the motor, purring away. In the stern sat K . . . with his two women. They both had on black straw hats with a garland of imitation flowers. Both were contendly smoking a pipe while the babies slept on their laps.

K . . . 's idea of bringing a Ford north to the Barren Lands was to use it in Winter so as to be able to cover a lot of ground and place a tremendous amount of fox traps all over the country.

The funny part of it was that it may have been a good idea after all. The Barren Lands, in many places, are fairly flat and always hard. Furthermore there is no snow to speak of. Providing one had enough gasoline and one did not mind making wide detours so as to avoid the rocks, it is quite possible that, at a pinch, a Ford could have been very useful.

Poor K . . . ! He was never able to work out his scheme. When he reached the sea, he bravely struck out along the bleak rugged shore for a certain river three hundred miles away.

A gale came up one evening and his boat was driven ashore. Nobody was drowned. K . . . and the two women, carrying the babies, struggled through the icy breakers to the land. But the entire cargo was lost.

They were rescued and taken care of by a band of natives during the entire winter. But since then K . . . has never been able to get a sufficient number of white foxes to be able to go back South again.

—There was the white man whose name I cannot remember. In fact, I don't think I ever knew it. I saw him only once—alive! It must have been eighteen years ago.

I was going upstream, south. He was paddling down, going north. He was alone in a birch bark canoe. His outfit was neatly packed in front of him. He was sitting in the stern. He wore a dark blue shirt and a red handkerchief round his neck. He was bareheaded and wore plain gold earrings, like some of the old sailors used to do.

I remember how his face glowed in the setting sun. He was a very dark man, with coarse, black hair. But he was no "breed." Anyone, used to the North, could see that at a glance! He must have been a Spaniard.

When our canoes were a few feet away from one another, I noticed that he had a rifle—lying flat on the top of his load, the stock a few inches only from his hand. There was no big game to speak of in that district. The sight of that rifle, just there, was unusual.

In a few seconds we met. Hardly three yards separated us. My two Indians, shy before that stranger, kept silent, watching. I was on the point of waving when his eyes met mine, squarely. I do not remember ever seeing

such a look in anyone's face. It was a mixture of curiosity, hatred, fright, contempt and daring. I was so startled that I never moved.

An instant later, the stranger had passed us downstream. He never turned back once to look at us. In a little while he had paddled round a bend and vanished.

A month later, we had turned north again and were in another district. We met some Indians who told us that a strange white man, a trapper, no doubt, had pitched his camp close by but that no one, yet, had gone out to visit him.

On the spur of the moment we swung out of our course to see the stranger. We saw his tent from quite a distance, snug and taut, under a cluster of jack pines, at the bottom of a little bay.

We landed on the sandy beach. A few old tracks were visible, here and there. Dead silence. We shouted once or twice. No answer. We walked up to the tent. It was empty but the flap was wide open. The fire was out—cold. It hadn't been used for days. Everything was in shipshape order. The trapper must have left some time ago on a reconnoitering trip.

But why had he left his tent open? Then, we saw a rifle, leaning against a tree. It was already rusty!

Suddenly one of the Indians gave a start. We looked in the bush, where he was looking.

There lay the body of a man, flat on his back, at the

foot of a tree. His arms were flung wide open. Both hands were closed, clutching tightly a handful of dead leaves.

We went up to him, slowly. He was dead. He had been dead for days. His eyes stared past us—at the sky —through the tree tops.

We could not find a trace of what he had died of. There were no signs of suicide nor murder.

He had just died there. I suppose just died—all alone.

And it was the man whom we had met a month before on the other river. The silent, defiant stranger who had passed us without a sign. He was still wearing the dark blue shirt and the red handkerchief round his neck. But the rifle was not under his hand. He had left it, this time, away from him—well out of his reach.

—There is C . . . He is an old Indian, the chief of his tribe. His hunting grounds are on the edge of the Barren Lands, further north than anyone else's.

When he used to come down, each summer, south, to the trading station and the Mission, he was still eight hundred miles north of the railway. He was a wonderful hunter and the shrewdest Indian I have ever met.

But he loved power, dearly, and thought that no one was a match for him. As long as he believed that he was getting the better of anyone, about anything, he was happy. But as soon as he found himself face to face with

a problem which he really could not solve, he was liable to lose his head and get himself in a mess.

Once a year, the Government sent a Commissioner to the trading post to pay the Treaty to the whole tribe assembled there. For a small sum of money handed out to each living head of the band, all the Indians, years and years before, had accepted to recognize the Government and its laws.

C . . . was the chief, by Government appointment, and he had been that, for years, since the Treaty had been signed, in fact.

Each summer, when the Commissioner arrived with his small fleet of canoes, flying the National flag, C . . . was on the bank, all dressed up in a dark blue navy coat with brass buttons and a navy cap with a gold tassel.

For years, he had fulfilled his task to the entire satisfaction of all concerned. He faithfully reported, each year, the deaths, the births, and the general state of health of his band. He received the Government's gratuities in merchandise and distributed them, painstakingly to the deserving ones.

Now and then he would have a brush with the local Missionary who, also, was a power in the land. Still, he was a good chief and his wisdom in taking his tribe to the right place to hunt for food and fur each winter was greatly admired.

Then came a year when C . . . for some absolutely un-

known reason came to the conclusion that the Government owed him a brand new canoe, as chief of the band. There was something about it in the Treaty, he said, but it was very, very vague.

For three years, each summer, he asked for his canoe. For three years, the Commissioner, who was old and on the point of retiring, told him to wait and that he would see what he could do about it.

The fourth year, a new Treaty Officer came. He knew nothing about the whole affair. He did not realize that C . . . had misunderstood the other Commissioner—who had not said no outright—and that he still believed that he had a right to a new canoe.

C . . . made his request again. The white man curtly refused. Then the old Indian lost his temper completely.

He made a wonderful speech, right in front of the whole tribe. He beat his breast, quoted the Treaty, "As long as the grass grows and the rivers flow, etc., etc.," called the King a liar and gave an ultimatum, "If he didn't get his chief's canoe, he would refuse the yearly sum of money which the Government gave him.So would everyone of his band; man, woman and child!"

The treaty Commissioner, I think, was rather surprised. But, wise to the ways of the North, he postponed his answer until the next day. Meanwhile, his secretary, his interpreter and a few friends, possibly the Missionary himself, talked things over with each member of the tribe.

The result was that the next day when the Government's Representative, at 10 o'clock, went to his tent under the big flag and announced that he was ready to pay Treaty, everyone of the band stepped up and got his money. Everyone except C . . .

The old chief was so certain that his authority over his men was absolute that he hadn't even taken the pains to come over and see what was going to happen. He had remained quietly in his tepee.

An hour later, a messenger came to him to tell him that he had been deprived of his rank as chief, that his bitterest rival in the band had been duly appointed in his place, and that he had to return immediately his blue coat with the brass buttons and his naval cap with the gold tassel, "the badge of the rank which he had lost."

C . . . was broken-hearted but he obeyed without a murmur.

A few days later, he left for the north, for the hunting grounds of the next winter, surrounded by his entire family and close relations. A little later, in a straggling line, the rest of the tribe followed. They may have had a new chief. Still, they took no chances. Instinctively they trailed the old leader.

Since that time C . . . has remained north, far, far north, on the edge of the Barren Lands. He absolutely refuses to go back south to the village. He will not accept his Treaty money, neither does his wife, his children, his

relatives and their offsprings, about forty heads all told.

Meanwhile the money accumulates and the Treaty's bookkeeping is all out of order, which is annoying.

There is also another side to the situation. C . . . knows perfectly well that the new chief has no hold on the tribe. He may have the right to wear the blue coat with brass buttons and the naval cap with a gold tassel, once a year, in summer, at Treaty time. Still, all the hunters follow him each fall and listen to his advice as far as the hunting and fishing are concerned, which gratifies his pride immensely.

How long will the situation last? Nobody knows. The Treaty Commissioner is displeased. The Missionary even more so. The children do not attend school in summer. Half the tribe hasn't been to Mass for three years. Furthermore, C . . . has reverted to some of the old laws of the tribe. For instance, when two young people have started liking each other, the old man has promptly sent them to a tepee. "Married." The couple has never objected of course. But children have been born. C . . . has put their names down in his books—that is in his memory. That's all!

Meanwhile neither the Government census nor the priest has been officially advised.

The more annoyed both are, the more resolved is C . . . to remain north—serenely aloof—still "the chief," a peaceful but stubborn rebel—waiting!

Waiting for what? Who knows. Justice? He doesn't believe in it! Arrest? Possibly! But he has so few years to live, now, and his hunting grounds are so very, very far away.

—There was old, old McF. . . He was a Scotchman from somewhere near the Hebrides. He crossed the Atlantic in the late forties and went North, at once, as a clerk for a trading company. From then on, he remained North until he was nearly seventy.

From east to west, through the prairies when they were wild, through the eternal spruce forest, through the unexplored Rockies, through the Barren Lands, in all directions, he roamed for fifty years.

Fur trader, trapper, guide, prospector, he wrestled his living out of the wilderness and was happy. He never married. He never had a home. He became part of the country. His only thoughts were for the North.

Then, one day, all of a sudden, old age struck him. Not too badly. Still, he discovered that he was unable to work. His arms refused to lift an axe, shoulder a rifle, handle a paddle. His eyesight was dim and his legs very weak.

Heartbroken, he made his way south, at last, and reached the little frontier town of T—. Everybody knew him there. He was welcomed home. Several of the leading citizens took him in, gave him a little shop with a

lean-to to sleep in and saw to it that he had food, warm clothes and tobacco.

From then on, old McF . . . became the local character of the town. He still refused to sleep in a bed and each night rolled himself in his blankets on the hard floor. No white woman could enter his shack, as he called it. He had an old squaw, from the nearby reservation, to come in each day and do his simple chores. He used to talk to her by the hour, and force her to cook his meals on a camp fire, outside, in the street. He always had a rifle hanging on the wall and an axe resting against the corner of the door.

During the day, he attended to his customers, the few who came in to buy his traps, knives and cooking utensils, but he really took no interest in the matter. He always wanted the sale to be over, so he could start spinning yarns about past days in the North.

At night the men in town took the habit of dropping in on him and playing poker in his back room. He never joined the game but he watched, listened, smoked and talked, while he kept his hands on the kitty.

The more the years went by, the more homesick he grew to go back to what he called "over there in the North."

The little town was on the 53°. It was the end of the railway. From October to April, it was buried under ice and snow. The spruce forest was only a few hundred

yards away. Indians would walk in to trade their furs. Dog sleighs passed daily through the one street. In summer, the river was there everlastingly flowing from the north, with its floating logs and its freight canoes.

Still the old man was pining for something else.

Sometimes in the early spring he would walk half a mile or so on the river bank and try to shoot ducks as they migrated from the south.

In summer, he would now and then troll for jack fish. While in the fall, he managed to kill a few prairie chickens, close by, with his old muzzle loader.

But his eyes were bad. His aching limbs made him suffer at each step he took. And his heart was not in it.

He was fretting, for he was living in the past. And we all knew it.

After he had been in town ten years, one day in June he asked one of his friends if it would be possible for him to go three hundred miles north to pass the summer. There was an Indian village there and he knew all the natives well.

It happened that a string of canoes, loaded with supplies, was going up there. The men took him with them readily. He sat in a canoe, all day, watching the banks of the river as they went by. When they came to a portage, he walked across slowly, if the distance was not too great. Otherwise an Indian carried him on his shoulders.

Once in the Indian village, comfortably settled in his

own little tepee, fed and looked after by the squaws, he seemed to regain part of his strength. He was happy.

Then, suddenly, he disappeared. Nobody missed him at first. Indians are careless. But when night came, a search was made. He couldn't be found. The next morning, an Indian discovered that his little hunting canoe was gone.

The searching then became frantic. For two days, the Indians cruised in the neighborhood. Finally, they hunted for him farther and farther away. The third day they found him.

McF . . . had reached a place he knew, on a lake, forty-five miles to the north. There was a hill, there, close to the water's edge, a bare hill, on the top of which stood an old, old weather-scarred jack pine.

The old man had climbed the hill, leaving his canoe in full view on the bank. He had taken with him a spade, found in the Indian camp.

When he had reached the jack pine he knew so well, painfully, patiently, he had started digging. It must have taken him hours and hours, although the soil was sand. Little by little, the hole had taken shape.

It was a grave, the old, old man's grave and it faced the lake and the northwest beyond.

When the Indians reached him, his task was finished but he was at the very end of the trail. He was dying. He could not speak, although he was conscious. He could

smile a little bit and once, just once, he pointed weakly to himself then to the grave.

The Indians knelt around him and stroked his white beard. They understood the love which that white man had for their own land and they loved him for it.

In a little while, he passed away, peacefully, just as the setting sun kissed the black tree tops on the other side of the lake. And they laid him to rest, in the grave he had dug.

A little later, they piled heavy rocks over the earth so the wild animals could not reach him. Finally they put up a plain wooden cross bearing his name.

The last time I passed, two years ago, the old, old jack pine was still there, standing watch over the lonely grave.

THREE MOOSE

BOTH ANIMALS FACED ONE
ANOTHER LIKE STATUES.

IV

"LISTEN to that one! Can't he roar? Ugly customer, I bet!"

We were lying in our tent, ready to sleep. Our camp was pitched on the banks of the Churchill River, close to Isle a la Crosse Lake, and it was already late in the fall. The night was perfectly calm and the hoarse challenge of the mating bull moose rang out, again and again, in the pitch darkness, a few hundred yards from where we were. Between calls, we could plainly hear the clash of his antlers against the trunks of the trees, as he lashed at them in his rage, tearing the bark and smashing the branches within his reach.

My traveling companion who, although hailing from far down south in the States, had been a trapper for years in this northern country, was soon asleep. To him, the call of the moose was just a noise which one had to put up with, in a certain season, just like the exasperating whining and howling of sleigh dogs tied to the pickets in winter time. To his mind, the animal we had just heard was just so much meat on the foot, and as he much preferred to eat a young barren cow, especially

at that time of the year, whatever the game laws had to say about it, he had promptly dismissed the subject from his mind, and, rolling himself in his rabbit skin robe, had started to snore peacefully.

All night long, each time I woke, I heard the bull moose thrashing and calling through the silent forest.

A few days later, I went out alone with an Indian to try my luck at getting a good head. We paddled downstream for a few miles. The mighty Churchill River rolled her swift gray waters between a range of high bluffs covered with poplars and birches, with a few spruce trees scattered among them. While the latter kept their everlasting shade of dark green, the leaves of the others had turned to gold and were already falling, scattering in little clouds at each strong gust of wind. On the river banks the thick willow bushes swarmed with blackbirds of all species, congregating there in a chattering countless multitude before migrating south. Ungainly squawking bitterns and swift silent teals flew up from among the roots while the sky was black with ducks of all kinds, flying in all directions, as if preparing for their long, long, flight to warmer climes.

The sun was hidden by low gray clouds and there was a touch of snow in the air. One felt, instinctively, that winter was very near.

After awhile, we left the river and entered a large creek, between two steep, muddy banks and paddled

our way upstream, slowly, silently, listening and looking for tracks. "There were no signs" as the Crees say. A few muskrat tracks here and there, and, at one spot, the fresh cuttings of a beaver.

We decided to leave the creek and portage over, through the bush, to a series of small inland lakes which we knew. It was just past noon when we got there and we stopped to "make fire." Half an hour later we suddenly heard distinctly the challenging call of a bull moose. It came from the opposite side of the lake and sounded a mile or so off from where we were.

We crossed the lake, paddling swiftly, then, leaving the canoe, we made our way through the bush, towards the sound, for, during that time, we had heard the call again several times.

At first, the bush was very thick. Willow trees, scattered among the spruce, barred our way while we had to struggle through a great number of dead trees with branches stretching stiffly in all directions. But little by little the bush thinned down and, after a while, we came to a clearing, an old burned area, where we could see for several hundred yards ahead of us. Whatever wind there was, blew softly in our faces and we crept low, using the small clumps of young trees, one by one, as a screen.

Then the call came again, a succession of grunts ending in a shattering roar, which sounded very close. Peer-

ing over the bush, we saw the moose, standing sidewise to us, barely one hundred yards away. Head erect, enormous, his antlers branching off in a wide sweep, he was motionless, looking intently past us, to our left. Suddenly, just at that moment, a second bull moose appeared at the edge of the clearing. Both animals faced one another like statues.

I forgot the purpose of my coming. I forgot the rifle in my hand. So did my Indian for that matter. We remained there huddled near the ground, watching intently.

After a pause of a few seconds, both moose called once, then the newcomer slowly advanced while the first one remained standing proudly, facing his foe. There wasn't then a sound to be heard, except the swishing of the grass and the crackling of the twigs under the moving animal's hoofs—and, now and then, a low savage snort from both. Little by little, the distance grew less. We held our breath and I felt the suspense like a dull, aching pain, which seemed to last for hours.

When, hardly ten feet separated them, the advancing bull stopped. There was another pause, of a second or two, then simultaneously, as if leaping at a given signal, the two animals hurled themselves at each other, and their heads met with a crash that must have been heard for several miles.

Both were in their prime, exactly of the same size and weight, although the one whose call we heard first, must have been the older by a year.

Antlers interlocked, the hair on their necks bristling, their eyes bloodshot with rage, they strained with all their might, one against the other, without attempting another move. Now and then one of them would fall back a step or two but recovered himself immediately. And the tide of battle swung evenly between them, for a long, long time.

During that period, they snorted continuously, while their hoofs mowed down the bushes and dug up the earth until every trace of green had disappeared and their battlefield looked like a patch of freshly ploughed ground.

After awhile, as if by mutual consent, they stopped for a fraction of a second. Then the older bull disentangling his antlers with one swift movement of his head, side stepped and lunged, tearing at the other's open flank, while he struck at his shoulder with his right front hoof. Instantly a long streak of blood appeared on the wounded animal's side, but the new move was countered by a similar thrust of his own antlers which went home with a tearing thud.

From thereon, they fought at a distance. Unable to force each other down by sheer brute strength and weight, they resorted to finer and deadlier methods, and,

round and round they went, lunging, hacking, slashing with antlers and front hoofs.

In an incredibly short time, their tongues were rolling out and their breath hung round them like a cloud, their bodies blackened with sweat and reddened with gore.

On and on they went, without a pause, foaming at the mouth, grunting with rage, apparently heedless to pain and exhaustion. How long this stage of the battle would have lasted, no one could say, when suddenly, at the edge of the clearing in front of us, a third moose appeared. Although three years old and quite large, he was dwarfed in size and weight by the two giants fighting to the death in front of him.

The newcomer stopped an instant, taking in the scene, then lifting his head high to send out his call. After that, grunting threateningly, he approached the two others at a trot. When he got within a few yards of them, the two old warriors saw him. With one accord, they stopped fighting and swerving to one side, hurled themselves head down at the new foe. Taken by surprise and crushed by the enormous weight of the two infuriated animals, the young moose fell back on his haunches, then, rolling to one side, crashed to the ground. Then the slaughter began. With hoofs and antlers, the two old moose kept their smaller rival down. Tearing and slashing with their antlers, they cut him

to shreds, prodding him through and through, lifting him a foot or so from the ground, then hurling him down again to stamp over him with hacking hoofs. In a few minutes the poor animal was dead, but the two others kept on, until, piece by piece, they had ripped and kicked the body in a shapeless mass of hide, flesh and bone. Then—and then only—did they stop. Drenched in gore from head to foot they looked like two incarnate fiends of a prehistoric age.

But the lust for blood was not yet dead in them. As soon as they saw each other, they plunged at one another instantly and their battle started again, raging up and down the clearing, as if forever. Nevertheless animal strength has its limit. In a little while, one of the moose began to show signs of exhaustion. It was the one who had dared to answer the challenge of the first one, standing alone in the clearing.

Once he fell on one knee, then on both, though each time he rose, charging gallantly to give himself a little breathing room. But there was no doubt that the tide of battle was slowly turning against him. It was now only a question of time before his antagonist would have him on the ground, at his feet. His only hope lay in the fact that the other moose, bleeding from countless wounds, was also weakening fast. But there was no pause in the struggle. If the strength of their bodies was withering at last under the terrific strain of the

battle, their fighting hearts showed no signs of surrendering. Neither foe gave ground willingly. Neither attempted to stop a second for rest. By this time, they had gone back to their former style of fighting. Antlers interlocked, they struggled, bitterly striving to wrestle or force the other down to the ground.

Tottering on their legs, they stumbled and lurched, tracing wide circles on the blood sodden battlefield. Once, both fell on their knees, and remained there, still straining, but with a mighty effort, they finally rose again. Finally, the younger animal seemed to shudder. Both his front legs straightened out and spread apart while his head, little by little, was pressed down, until his nose touched the earth. Then, for one second, he made a last dying effort to rise. Unable to lift the crushing weight bearing down on him he threw his head to the left. Something snapped and his body rolled over on one side while the other moose, his antlers suddenly free, lurched forward and fell on his knees over him.

The battle was over. Slowly the big moose rose, backed and plunged his horns for the last time in the flank of his foe, lying stretched before him. But the fallen warrior lay still. He had died, a few seconds before, when he was still on his feet, fighting.

The victor lifted his head and looked around. Then he called out, once, savagely, blood spurting from his mouth. In a few seconds, he started walking away,

reeling, stopping every two or three steps, his legs bending under the weight of his body, until he reached a little mound where he made his last stand. His head was hanging down and we could plainly hear his blood dripping on the dead leaves.

In the end, he turned round to face his fallen foe. Twice his head went up but the call never came. Little by little, his legs sagged and he fell on his knees. There he remained for a little time. After that, shaking his head he rose once more to his full height. Then, with a groan, he crashed to one side, stone dead.

And a little blue jay flew over from the edge of the clearing. It perched itself on a bush, close by, looking down inquisitively at the mighty warrior lying motionless under the gray northern sky.

MY FRIEND KAKOOT

MY FRIEND KAKOOT
AND WIFE NUMBER THREE.

V

I HAVE a friend who has three wives. This sounds perfectly immoral, but it is a fact. And not only has he three wives, but he lives with all three together in perfect peace and happiness, which is quite a feat in itself, as anyone, I think, will concede.

My friend is really a Canadian. Should any very religious person, reading these lines, feel the urgent need to go to him so as to show him how wrong are his ways, and incidentally try to save his soul, he will have to travel quite a bit. For my friend lives close to the Arctic Circle—without a permanent address—and far away from the sea, which makes it all the more difficult and complicated to reach him at any season of the year.

His name is Kakoot, and with a little luck, or if sundry arrangements have been made a year or so beforehand, one may find him between Ennadai Lake and Yathkyed Lake, somewhere on the Kazan River, which, as anybody might or might not know, is between the sixty-second and the sixty-third degree, in the Northwest Territories.

I might add also that my friend Kakoot is a full-blooded Eskimo. I have known him for several years, and not later than last summer I had the privilege of touring his own bit of the country, in his company, for a matter of several weeks.

Kakoot, I should judge, is about forty-five years old. I never could get his right age from him, for the very simple reason that he has absolutely no idea when he was born. He knows the exact spot of his birth, which, by the way, is a hollow between two rocky hills on the shores of Angikuni Lake. He also remembers his father and mother and two of his grandparents, and can show you where they are buried, but these are about all the indications he can give you as to his approximate age.

In appearance he is about five feet six and nearly as broad as he is high, especially when he has his winter clothes on. He wears his hair long, not in a braided pig-tail such as some of the old Indians still used to wear a few years ago, but loose all around the head, evenly trimmed at the base of the neck and clipped short above the eyebrows. His face is dark and sunburned, with tremendous cheek bones, very hollow cheeks, and a few straggling black hairs at each corner of the mouth, giving him a little moustache "à la Chinese." His eyes are dark brown and hardly ever still, although they look directly at you when he speaks. His nose is slightly curved, his jaws exceedingly square, and his teeth,

although very even, seem to have been filed down to the very edge of the gums. That comes from cracking too many reindeer bones in search of the marrow. He smokes incessantly a short black pipe.

Kakoot is by far the most intelligent and the most prosperous Eskimo among the thirty-odd families which form the entire population of that part of the Barren Lands.

While the other natives never go to the sea, and live entirely on the caribou between the edge of the trees on Nueltin Lake and Baker Lake farther north, he has traveled extensively. He knows three hundred miles of the western shores of Hudson Bay, has been as far as Bothnia to the north and the Great Slave Lake to the west, and has picked up a lot of knowledge and experience through dealing with other tribes and meeting, occasionally, white men.

He relies, of course, on his own hunt, meat and fur, to obtain all the necessities of life. Nevertheless he is a born trader and does not hesitate to journey south to the trees so as to get a small outfit of goods which enables him to collect part of the other Eskimos' white foxes.

From all accounts he is a shrewd dealer, drives a hard bargain, and, I'm sorry to say, is not overscrupulous as regards prices and quantities. All that, added to his untiring energy, has made him what he is, and

his igloo and topek contain priceless treasures in the eyes of the other natives.

Last summer, for instance, he was the proud possessor of a good-sized wooden trunk, all brass-bound, a phonograph of old vintage but still in good working order, a shotgun, a Mauser pistol with two hundred rounds, a new 303 British rifle with a fair amount of ammunition, a fishing net, a secondhand canoe, a few carpenter's tools with nails and screws, a three months' provision of tea and plug tobacco, and, last but not least, white men's clothes for summer wear, including a pair of rubber boots.

And then, of course, there are his three wives. It takes a lot of things to keep three wives, even within a short distance of the Arctic Circle. Kakoot manages that as well as he seems to manage everything else, as far as he is concerned.

His wife number one is about his age. He married her when he was a very young man. She has had several children who are now grown up and have families of their own. In summer she discards her native garb of winter hides and wears, outwardly at all events, civilized clothes, consisting of a dress and shirt of thick stroud and a shawl round her head. She wears no ornaments and her hair is arranged at the back in a loose knot. Her appearance is very slovenly, reminding one of a middle-aged gypsy. But she rules the household

with a rod of iron and superintends the storing of the food, the drying of the meat, the tanning of the caribou skins, the manufacturing of garments and boots, and the everlasting search for dry willow twigs for the fire. When the family moves from one place to another she sees that the loads are evenly distributed. Finally, she attends to the dogs.

Wife number two is about thirty or thirty-five years of age. Her children still play about the camp, but can look out for themselves. She wears native clothes all year round, unadorned, and her sole duty is to accompany Kakoot wherever he goes, either hunting or traveling. Then she tends his camp, repairs his clothes, looks after the dogs, prepares the food, and sets an occasional fox trap. Outside of that, she seems to do nothing but sit on the ground, smoke her own or somebody else's pipe, and spit thoughtfully into the fire.

Wife number three is barely twenty. Her sole duty is to bear Kakoot children. She also wears native clothes, caribou fur in winter, caribou hide in summer. But she must always look beautiful. So she is covered with ornaments of all kinds. For instance, when I saw her a few months ago she was wearing a brand-new two-piece suit of reindeer hide, scraped and tanned until it was nearly white. Her trousers were tucked in high deerskin boots, the laces below the knee being strips of red flannel. The swallowtail of her coat nearly

reached the ground, the edges being trimmed with wolverine fur and a row of empty cartridge shells. She wore on her chest, from neck to waist, a wide "stomacher" of multicolored beadwork; in the centre hung a large bright ornament which I recognized as one of my spoon baits, given to Kakoot the summer before, from which the hook had been neatly filed off. Her head was uncovered, but her hair, parted from back to front, was divided in two braids which, tightly wrapped in beadwork, hung down beside her cheeks like two fat sausages. Her wrists were one mass of copper and bead bracelets, while each finger of her hands sported several broad copper rings, the middle finger of each hand having as many as five. She was smoking a little soapstone pipe. The bowl was dark green in color, somewhat like jade, while from the willow stem, two feet long, hung little streamers of beads.

Yes, she looked beautiful, and knew it, too. I had no difficulty in having her pose for a few photographs, but each time she insisted on raising both her hands, palms forward, to each side of her face. She did not want her rings to be out of the picture!

Kakoot, of course, is tremendously proud of her, but it seems that it would be a breach of etiquette, on his part, to take any notice of her in public. And when you try to say something about her he immediately endeavors to attract your attention in another direction.

Little does he know, I suppose, that I was told by other natives how much he paid for that young wife of his. "Ten white foxes, a secondhand canoe, a new rifle, and ten boxes of ammunition." A tremendous price, which her father snapped up greedily. But the poor old man did not have time to enjoy his wealth long. For that was in the summer, two years ago, when the caribou, migrating south, changed their usual route and all the Eskimos missed the herds completely. Kakoot, being wise and having a net, pitched off at once to the nearest lake and started fishing for dear life before freeze-up. Thus he was able to "stack up" enough trout and white fish to last him until spring, when the reindeer migrated north again and he was able to secure all the fresh meat he needed. But the old man was obstinate, and he went on and on, searching for the herds, until his food gave out and his dogs lay down, dying one by one. Finally he gave up the fight himself and starved slowly to death. Kakoot found him the next spring—that is, what remained of him—under the torn skins of his topek, which, crushed under the weight of the snow of the whole winter, had fallen down, covering his body like a shroud.

II

When I reached Kakoot's camp last June I found everyone expecting me. Had I not made special arrange-

ments with him, a year before, to meet him on that very same spot and explore, with him, the lower regions of the Kazan River? For a whole year he had prepared for that trip in my canoe. For twelve months he had told all the other Eskimos about the event. For weeks ahead he had all the children of the camp perched on every hilltop, looking south, so that he should be advised in time of my arrival. And when I did appear with my two Indians a small volley of rifle shots heralded my approach.

As soon as I stepped on the shore I noticed that the Kakoots had finished their yearly spring cleaning. This, of course, is an important matter, but it is really quite simple. It consists in removing one's self and all one's belongings a few hundred yards upstream or downstream, as the case may be.

When twenty-odd people with at least as many dogs have wintered on the same spot for about six or seven months, eating, roughly speaking, five hundred reindeer and goodness knows how many fish, throwing the discard each day around the igloos in the deep snow—when that snow melts in the spring, the sooner one leaves that place, the better it is for all concerned!

Everyone was on the bank to shake hands—the three wives, the children, and a few orphans and destitute grownups, for Kakoot has a kind heart. I might add also that he dearly loves a large retinue. But Kakoot

himself was not there. As chief of his clan, as my equal and as my host, he was waiting for me in one of the topeks—his own, the largest one of all. He was trying to look unconcerned, smoking his pipe and sitting on his brass-bound trunk. But he showed his excitement by streams of perspiration which ran down his face and disappeared down his neck.

When I entered the topek, bending low under the reindeer-skin flap, he rose to meet me and we solemnly shook hands in dead silence. Then I pulled out my tobacco pouch to have a smoke. With a grunt of joy Kakoot stretched out his hand and took it. While he stuffed my precious tobacco with thumb and first finger in the bowl of his pipe, which was still burning, I could see him store a lot more, with the remaining fingers, in the inside of his palm.

Having had my property restored with a polite and loud "Matna," I proceeded to fill my own pipe. Then I sat beside him on the brass-bound trunk; and under the admiring eyes of all the other Eskimos, young and old, who by then had crept in, one by one, my friend Kakoot and I smoked in silence the pipe of peace and contentment.

Such was the way we met a few months ago. The next day we proceeded on our way north, Kakoot sitting beside me and acting as pilot.

While my two Indians and myself, having traveled

steadily for seven weeks to reach that spot, were beginning to show rather a little wear and tear in our clothing, Kakoot was splendidly rigged up. Everything he wore was new. He had on his rubber boots, a pair of blue overalls over a suit of thick woolen underwear, two shirts,—one black, one gray,—two mackinaw shirts, —one in black and green, the other in black and red checks,—a huge pair of caribou-skin gloves, and a wolverine fur cap with a long peak and ear flaps. His sleeping robe was in a neat waterproof bag, which also contained, outside of several pairs of moccasins, a large package of raw reindeer tongues. Of these he would eat one or two occasionally, between meals, peeling them carefully with a clasp knife until, held at one end, they looked exactly like large pink bananas.

The difference of manner with which Kakoot, during the entire trip, addressed the two Indians and myself was very marked. He plainly considered my two men his inferiors. He was quite amiable to them, however—oblivious, of course, of the fact that my two Crees, true to their race, thought him only one degree removed from a wild savage; but he never lost a certain patronizing attitude which was very apparent. As far as I was concerned, he treated me as an equal. He knew me as some sort of white chief hailing from the South. Didn't I know him as Kakoot, the mightiest hunter and cleverest trader of all these Barren Lands?

During all the time we traveled together he did cheerfully his share of the work, even more than his share at times, especially when, for instance, we had to look for firewood over a few acres of ground. Then he was by far our superior. He seemed to guess with one look at the bleak landscape where there was a patch of dead willows, and in an incredibly short time he would be back, staggering under a load of fagots.

But all the time his manner to me was that of a host showing to his guest his own house and lands. Every mile or so he would point out a rock, a caribou trail or river crossing, a hill, a far-away lake, an old camp site. He would call it by name, making me repeat it several times, and then try to tell me all about it. Here he would draw my attention to a coulee between the rocks. where he had once a cache raided by a wolverine. There he would show me, on a high ledge of hill, a mound of rocks, a grave, sometimes of a relation, always of someone he had known. Now and then we would land and examine the spot. Kakoot, of course, would be there first to look things over.

I recall one enormous grave. The dead man's name was Ky-yo. I remember it because it means "wood." He had been laid upon his back on a flat slab of stone. Around him and above him the Eskimos had built a regular vault of rocks. It happened that the base had been made out of such huge boulders that the latter

projected over the body, thus enabling the men to build up a round roof of lesser boulders which held together and did not fall down on the dead. The body was therefore ensconced in a little niche, just like a coffin, but there were a few cracks between the stones through which the sun filtered. And Kakoot was delighted when he found a large one through which we could plainly see the bottom of the tomb and, in the middle of it, the white skeleton, rigid, gleaming in the semi-darkness.

When there was nothing of special interest to show, Kakoot would describe in gestures the country ahead of us, the lakes, the winding of the river, the rapids, and the portages. He had discovered that I had a notebook and a pencil. At regular intervals he would borrow them and draw for me maps of the surroundings over and over again. First he would draw one starting from where we were at the time and going northward. Then, another time, he would draw the same one starting from where we were going to for instance, backward to where we were at the time. The maps, made perhaps half a day apart, would always coincide exactly.

He would always add information about the country by little crude drawings on the side—reindeer, musk ox, willows if there was a certain quantity, fish, topeks with people around them. At first it was somewhat confusing, but in a very short time one could understand them

perfectly. The only thing he could not do was to decrease the scale of his map. He was used to a certain scale, and when he had to draw two hundred miles he needed sheets and sheets of paper, which was very expensive.

Although Kakoot shared our meals and ate enormously, he really enjoyed only the tea, sugar, while it lasted, and jam. Pork and beans he scorned. Bannock he could not understand, and fresh caribou meat he thought we spoiled by overcooking it. Like all inland Eskimos, he was accustomed to raw frozen meat in winter and what we called "lukewarm meat" in summer. He also missed his sun-dried pemmican and fish. Nevertheless he always took a special pride in showing us where and how to get the best meat and fish throughout the trip.

When we needed meat and sighted a herd of caribou, he would whip out of his pocket a small telescope and select the buck most easily stalked and appearing the fattest. Then he would take great pains in pointing it out to me, crawling behind me and looking down my rifle barrel before I shot, so as to make sure that I had understood which one to kill. When we could not find meat and needed fish, he would never let us camp until we had reached a likely place for our net.

As far as duck eggs were concerned, he knew every island where the birds laid in large quantities, and took

great delight in helping us to collect what we needed. He liked eggs, for that matter, just as much as we did, and he could eat three times more than any one of us. The dividing of the spoils was made easy by the fact that we wanted only the fresh ones, while he preferred the other kind. When we had found a certain quantity we always put them in a kettle full of water. The ones that remained flat at the bottom we kept. The others, which floated on the surface, Kakoot took for his share.

While we ate ours boiled three minutes, he would invariably eat his raw. Of course, at first when I saw him break the shell, fish out the contents with the point of his knife, and swallow them as we would an oyster, I should have preferred to be elsewhere. Happily one gets accustomed to small details such as these when one travels north of 63.

III

The most remarkable achievement of Kakoot was the way he carried on a running conversation with me, considering that I can remember only about twelve words of Eskimo, while he does not know more than thirty words of English, picked up here and there, and invariably pronounced with a Husky ending. For instance, his way of saying George was "Joss"; willow, "willok"; rifle, "reeflek"; but one caught on after a certain time.

His idea of time was always in "sleeps" for days, while for hours he pointed to where the sun should be. He used the word "hello" all the time, just to fill in or to mean "Then I saw" or "Then we shall reach such and such a spot." The only words which he pronounced perfectly and always in their proper place were "Never mind." He always spoke of his children, some grown up to manhood, as "me baby," and of his father, dead by now, as "me old buck."

But his real way of talking was by gestures. With one or two words in English and Eskimo to put you on the right track, he could pantomime anything, and we understood him perfectly. I remember especially one story concerning the father of one of the orphans in his camp. The man was killed by a lame timber wolf, while one of the other Eskimos, a mile or so away, saw the whole tragedy through his telescope from the top of the hill. When we had left Kakoot and reached the trees that August, we met a white trapper and trader who speaks Eskimo well and who knows all the natives. We asked him about the story and he told it to us exactly as Kakoot had made us understand it through pantomime.

"It was a few years ago. The Eskimo had shot a lone reindeer, a straggler from the big herd that had migrated south. He cut up the carcass and cached it under a huge mass of rocks. He had used his four

remaining cartridges to kill the caribou and his rifle was empty. His boots were covered with blood and he left a red track on the snow as he plodded back to his igloo. There was a lame wolf in the neighborhood. He had been caught in a fox trap in the early fall, had broken the chain, and had been seen several times limping on three legs, with the trap still fixed on one of his hind legs. The brute, unable to follow the reindeer, was starving.

"Wolves in the far North have the habit of feeding on the remains of the slain deer, and rifle shots do not frighten them, for the country is wide open and treeless and they can see for miles from the tops of rocks and hills.

"When the Eskimo killed the caribou, it happened that the lame wolf was within hearing. From a distance he watched the man caching the carcass, then limped up as soon as the hunter went on his way. But he soon found out that there was nothing left for him to eat, and that the weight of the rocks defied his frantic efforts to dig out some of the meat. Maddened by hunger, the wolf took up the man's trail, which was all the more enticing from the fact that each footstep had left a mark of fresh blood in the snow.

"While the Eskimo plodded on without thinking of looking behind him, the other man, having also heard the shots from the camp, had climbed up a hill close

by and was watching the approaching hunter with his telescope. In a few minutes the wolf had closed the gap between them, for even a lame wolf on three legs can travel faster than a man on two.

"Forgetting the cringing caution of his race, the wolf never stopped at the sight of the hunter. When the latter, hearing a noise, turned around, it was already too late. Before he could raise his rifle as a club the wolf had darted in at close quarters, snapping at the nearest leg, as he would do when trying to hamstring a caribou. The man was tripped up and fell backward; the wolf instantly flew at his throat and remained there. There was an awful struggle, the brute staying uppermost and keeping his hold. The other Eskimo ran down the hill for his rifle, then hastened to the rescue, but when he got within long-distance range the man was dead, his neck and face already gone.

"The lame wolf, hearing the bullets whistling by, limped away, untouched, and all the man could do was to shoulder his dead comrade and carry him back to camp for burial."

That was the story that the white trapper told us and it fitted exactly with what we had understood from Kakoot's gestures and pantomime. The only thing we missed was the parentage between the slain man and the boy in Kakoot's camp. He repeated over and over again the child's name, but as we did not know it we

failed to grasp his meaning, although we knew he was speaking of someone in his topek.

As far as I remember, the only words in Kakoot's story that we understood were "taitba" (meaning "over there"); "look" (meaning "looked and saw"); "totko" (meaning "reindeer"); "Ennuit" (meaning "Eskimo"); and "Him old buck" (meaning "He was the father of").

The first and only stumblingblock was at the beginning, and it was the word "wolf" in Eskimo. Kakoot did not know it in English, and when he repeated it in his own language we did not understand. When he saw that, he proceeded to imitate a wolf. He showed the height of the animal with his hand, then got on four paws and howled. In the meantime he was describing with one hand the shape of the head, the pointed muzzle, the stuck-up ears. We nodded approvingly. Still he was not satisfied. He may have thought that we were thinking he meant a dog. So, still on four paws, he described the tail by placing his arm, curving downward, exactly where the tail should start from. That he knew we should grasp, for when one describes a Malemute's tail one always pictures it curled up on one side or other of the rump.

The rest of the story went on swimmingly. The killing of the reindeer with four cartridges, the cutting up of the carcass, the piling of the rocks, the other Eskimo watching from the hill with his telescope—all that we

followed as fast as he made the proper gestures. The limping of the wolf was easy, but it took some time for him to explain the fox trap. He finally drew its exact size in the sand, and then we knew.

But the climax of the story was the pantomime of the struggle between man and beast. Kakoot worked himself up into a frenzy and, rolling and struggling on the ground, first took the part of the wolf, then of the man, uttering the most savage growls or the most heart-rending cries, as the case would be.

Finally, when he described the man carrying away painfully the body of his dead friend, I think that the exhaustion he appeared to be suffering from was real. He was quite pale under his tan, and bathed in perspiration.

When our trip was over and we had returned to Kakoot's camp on our way south, we took leave of one another on the river bank, under the eyes of the whole family. Poor old Kakoot! He was munching one of his raw caribou tongues—which, by the way, was the first thing he asked for of wife number one as he stepped out of the canoe. He was plainly moved at the idea of saying farewell, and for once his excited laugh was gone and his busy hands were still.

When we had paddled a little way upstream I turned round for a last look. There he was, standing bare-headed on the bank, beside one of his meat caches. His

three wives were at his side, the rest of the clan grouped a few yards behind. In the background rose the huge topek of reindeer skins which was his home.

I waved at him for the last time, and he answered by one small gesture with his right hand. Then, before dipping my paddle in the swift gray waters of the Kazan River, I shouted to him in English, "Good luck to you, my friend Kakoot." He remained silent, but I am certain that he understood my meaning.

FURS AND TRADERS

(From a Pre-war Diary)

I HAVE NOT SEEN OR HEARD A THING, BUT
I HAVE THE FEELING THAT I AM NOT ALONE.

VI

THIRTY-TWO days! It seems incredible, but here is the date in front of me. "Twenty-ninth of November," the day when I scrawled my last few lines.

A whole month has gone by. I remember the little frontier town, at the end of the railway—"at the line," as they say in the West. The absolute fringe of civilization. Just a few wooden shacks built alongside the tracks, with a long board walk undulating above the snow. A poolroom. The general store, displaying proudly the sign, "His Majesty's Mail." A deserted saw mill. The tiny depot, the only brick building in the community, with its huge water tower, all out of proportion with anything around it. Stray dogs roaming between the houses. A dismal background of burned timber. A gray sky with low-flying clouds and a small flock of black ravens wheeling aimlessly back and forth.

A picture of utter desolation, under the staggering icy breath of the far North.

Yes, I was there a month ago. Where am I now? I do not know exactly. I should say about six hundred miles

north of the line—that is, if I can rely on what I think was our daily mileage during the last thirty-two days.

I have reached a fur-trading station. The man in charge has been here fifteen years. He is my boss for the time being. But he told me yesterday that I should have to go on soon, farther north.

Somewhere farther north! It sounds simple, but it means such a lot here.

The man's name is McL . . . and he was born in the Shetland Islands. I always thought that those islands were famed only for their small ponies. I know now that they have also a breed of dour men who can reach well over six feet in height and who are not so easy to get on with.

McL . . . came to this country and the North when he was eighteen years old, and I should judge him to be at least sixty now. He does not seem to know what a map is and he always refers to the South as Canada, which is rather confusing.

I have tried to find out exactly where he intends to send me. "North," is the only answer.

I never knew the north extended so far. When I reached the end of the railway, I thought I was pretty far up. (They call it "down" here, because the rivers flow down to the Arctic Ocean). Later on, after thirty-two days of walking from morn until night behind a dog sleigh, I was certain that I had reached at least the end

of the trees. Thirty-two days! It's a long, long spell, especially when there is nothing to see during the whole trip—just a howling wilderness of frozen lakes and rivers, with snow-capped spruce trees. And here, in this trading station, they still speak of going north!

There is nothing very thrilling about this fur post. Just a log hut called a store, with a dwelling fifty feet away, built exactly the same way, two small warehouses, and a dog corral.

The only difference between the store, where business is supposed to be conducted, and the living quarters is a stove. The latter is in the house, and it is kept red-hot twenty hours out of twenty-four.

The store—for economical reasons, I suppose—is never heated, and when one has to go there to handle any kind of merchandise one hardly dares to take one's fur mitts off.

Yesterday the thermometer inside showed fifteen below zero. I was trying to cut bacon in thin slices and to weigh the result accurately. It was not so easy as one would think. When I had finished, McL . . . said that it was mild for this time of the year!

All the Indians are away hunting. No one has remained behind except a few old widows and cripples whom the post keeps round the place for odd jobs such as cutting wood, bringing in water, and fishing for dog feed through the ice of the lake.

I am supposed to rest here for a few days before I go

north. My nose was frostbitten coming here. So was my left ear. Both are swollen to three times their normal size. But having been treated at once, on the way up, by "snow rubbing," they are expected to cure rapidly. I hope so!

My feet are in bad shape. For thirty-two days the strap of my snow-shoes rubbed and bit into the flesh at the base of my toes. Caribou fat seems to be the one and only known remedy.

—Two weeks have gone by and I really feel all right again. During all that time I don't think McL . . . has said ten words to me a day. I wonder if that is the result of forty years in the North. I feel more lonely with that man in the room than if I were camped alone in the middle of the lake on the ice, without even my team of dogs to cheer me up.

—Second of February. I have left McL . . . and I am supposed to be "on my own" here.

What is "here"? A tiny log hut, ten by sixteen, a stove, a wooden plank supported by four sticks on which I sleep in my fur robe, a biscuit box for a seat, and all my trading outfit hanging from nails on the walls and from the ceiling. Behind the shack, in a lean-to, the heavy stock, such as pork, flour, traps, beans, and lard.

I don't know yet exactly where I am. "Northwest Territories of Canada" is the pompous title on my trader's license.

What I am certain of is that it took me seventeen days of hard walking to get here. Also that I am very near the Barren Lands, close to where the trees cease to grow, on the hunting grounds of the Chipewayan Indians, and near enough to trade occasionally with the "Inland" Eskimos, if the latter come south. This, of course, means that there is still "a lot of north" for me to "go down to."

My trading station—they call it an outpost—is on the crest of a small hill which is used as a two-mile portage by the natives going north and south. The river, flowing fifty feet below and right in front of my door, curves around to the east, then disappears toward the north between two gray cliffs of granite, in a series of wild rapids, to emerge behind me, on the other side of the portage.

At this time of the year everything is frozen solid, except the rapids, which I cannot see from the shack.

In the calm of the evening, when the thermometer has gone down and down to forty below, if I stand outside of my door the silence is deathly. On the other side of the river I can see the faint outline of the hills, half a mile away, with spruce tops showing dark through the snow. Not a living thing in sight.

Suddenly a whisper reaches me faintly through the air. In a second it grows and grows into a muttering groan, then finally into a dull, booming roar. After that

it dies out suddenly—utter and absolute silence reigns supreme again. Every few minutes the weird sound returns again over the frozen land, then goes out again completely. It is the eternal sobbing of the rapids,—unfrozen, twirling free of the grip of the ice, unconquered, wild, lashing its frantic way through the rocky canyon,—the everlasting moan which the last breath of shifting wind wafts here and there, toward me, then away from me, as I stand all alone on my doorstep.

—I have been here three weeks, and I haven't seen a living soul. No Indians are expected this way before a month. The afternoon is drawing to a close. My five dogs are tied to their posts, whining with hunger. I have no meat here. The cache is two miles away, on the other side of the portage. I am weak with loneliness. I must go over there, but I will not harness the team. I'll walk there alone and bring back just what we want—the dogs and I.

Half an hour of weary plodding along the trail, clear and hard with my three weeks' footsteps—a narrow, one man's trail, winding its way through small scrub brush, coiling itself like a huge snake on the snow. The meat—caribou meat—is lying on a platform ten feet high, each of the four poles entwined with barbed wire. When I reach the place, my eyes rest a second on the snow below. Tracks—heavy, wide pads—wolf tracks. A pack of six or seven "timbers" have been there, under

my meat, a few minutes before. The frozen powdery snow is still trickling downward on the sides of each track. A strong throat-racking smell is still floating about, the unmistakable wolf smell of a hunting pack.

Not a sound anywhere. Not a movement in the bush. Just snow, snow everywhere, and a few gray boulders scattered about, grim, in all sorts of weird and fantastic shapes.

Slowly I raise the ladder from the ground, climb up to the platform, and cut the meat, the blows of my axe echoing through the stillness of the evening. Before I get down my eyes search the surrounding country. Nothing in sight. Packing my load, I turn back toward "home."

The light is failing. No sunset tonight reddens the northeast. The sky has suddenly turned dark gray. A few light streaks to the southeast herald the northern lights.

Halfway back to the shack I suddenly stop, shuddering slightly. I have not seen or heard a thing, but I have the feeling that I am not alone. Turning round, I see three gray shadows standing motionless on the trail, a hundred yards from me. In a second I am again on my way. Another quarter of a mile! I must look back. Five gray shadows: three on the trail, two on the right side, in the deep snow, much nearer. One of the shadows moves slightly, its head down, and the light in its eyes, for a fraction of a second, flashes in the gathering shadows.

A last effort—a steady walk, with no apparent haste, and here is the shack. My dogs are whining, far down in their throats. Hunger? Welcome? I think it is fear!

A last look round. Six wolves are standing motionless, fifty yards away, silent as ghosts.

A second more and I am able to grasp my rifle. A spluttering flame, a shattering roar, with the whining of the bullet skimming through the low bush, and then silence. Nothing! The six wolves have vanished completely.

—For two days and two nights a blizzard has been raging without a sign of lifting. My dogs have disappeared. They were off their chains when the bad weather came. They must have burrowed behind some rock, letting the snow cover them up. There they will remain, snug and warm, until the storm is over.

As I sit beside the little stove, I can hear the hissing of the powdery snow lashing one side of the hut, while tiny little streams, like white sand, trickle between the cracks down to the floor and melt there in a few seconds, leaving ugly black puddles of water. The beams, under the roof, are creaking like the timbers of a sailing ship at sea, and now and then the whole shack shudders as if it were being torn away from its foundations.

It is already noon of the third day. Amid the howling wind I suddenly hear the sharp yell of an Indian. In a second my door is opened and a small, thickset man

stumbles in. Covered with snow, entirely wrapped in caribou skins, he is hugging to his breast a large fat fur bag, which he promptly lays down on the floor. With one sweep of his arm he tears his coat off; then, paying no attention to me, he kneels down, unties the cord, and slowly but gently extricates from the bag a small boy about six or seven years of age.

The child is rather thin, but does not seem the worse for what he has been through. He blinks at the lamp, then at me. Satisfied, he grins at the red-hot stove, then, turning to the man, asks for food.

In a few minutes my two visitors are eating the remains of my pork and beans and drinking the tea which I hurriedly brewed as soon as the boy spoke.

In a little while the child goes to sleep, and the man, filling his pipe from my pouch, turns at last to me and starts talking slowly in Cree. He is a full-blooded Chipewayan, but he knows that I cannot speak his language. Very few white men can. He is an old man, sixty-five years old at least, and the boy is his grandchild.

His family is camped fifty miles or so away from here. His sons are trapping. Tea was short and there was no more tobacco; so he decided to go down to McL... He didn't know the outpost was opened.

He started on his journey before the blizzard came. He had been camped, "storm bound," on the other side of the portage since the day before yesterday, waiting

for the bad weather to blow over, and had heard me chopping wood in the shelter of the shack. So he came at once. His dogs are all right, like mine, hidden somewhere in the bush.

Why did he take the child with him on the trip? Just for company. And then, after all, it is good for a boy to learn how to travel when he is very young.

Yes, he is glad I am here. He has skins. He will trade them for tea and tobacco and return to his people much more quickly than if he had been obliged to go right down to McL...

For forty-eight hours the strange pair remain with me, and I am very happy to have them. The child hardly ever speaks to me, but he plays about the room. His chief amusement seems to be the setting of a few small mink traps which are lying about, then the springing of them with the end of a stick.

The old man smokes a great deal of my tobacco and talks quite freely. His appetite is terrible. He must average six meals a day.

When the time comes to say good-bye, at the end of the portage, the child is placed, sitting in his fur bag, in the middle of the sleigh. The old man asks me to visit his camp, which I promise to do shortly. His last words are "I will feed you well, but you must tell me which part of the caribou you like best." I answer, "The feet," meaning "The ribs." My Cree is not what it should be.

I do not realize my mistake at the time and my Indian friend takes it for granted that I know exactly what I am saying.

So off they go north, both politely waving good-bye, while I remain on the hill, watching the sleigh dwindling away on the ice of the river.

—A week later. I have not seen a soul since my two new friends, young and old, came to visit me with the blizzard. I am restless. Furthermore, I must try to get some fur. I am going to them tomorrow at daybreak.

—A little hollow between two sandy hills, curving exactly like a horseshoe. North is the highest part of the ridge, sparsely covered with spruce and tamarack. South, in the opening, lies a very small lake, frozen solid.

In the centre of the hollow, at the foot of the incline, five huge caribou-skin tepees, which cluster respectfully round a tiny log hut. Here and there meat platforms and dog corrals. Everywhere, on the snow, discarded deer-skins which the dogs have torn into shreds.

On one side, a huge pile of firewood, neatly cut up. On the other, a dead tree, shorn of its branches, on the trunk of which are nailed innumerable skeletons of all the animals trapped by the Indians. Marten, wolf, fox, wolverine, and mink.

My arrival causes a horrible sensation. My dogs are glad to reach camp, but the Indian dogs resent the presence of strange huskies. Before I am able to leave

the back of my sleigh, every stray dog in the camp has piled on top of my team and I am in danger of losing it. Happily, in a few seconds all the Indians,—men, women, and children,—hearing the noise, are out of their tents. A minute goes by in confusion. Fur flies, dogs snarl, and the loud whacks of wooden clubs and fish floats echo sharply through the air. Then silence.

The attacking huskies have been driven away, and my dogs, sore, ruffled, and bloody, lick their wounds, waiting to be taken out of harness and tucked in for the night.

My old friend—"Grandfather," as I call him to myself; his name is Kasimir—is waiting for me in the shack. His wife is there. So are three or four other women. The boy is in a corner and recognizes me dutifully. We shake hands all round.

While I begin talking to the old man, the women start boiling something in the lean-to outside of the shack. They are using an enormous copper kettle. I can hear the crackling of the firewood and smell the boiling meat.

After a long time the kettle is brought in and placed on the floor. My host politely tells me to select my portion. With my clasp knife I am able to fish out my share. It is the leg of a caribou, from hoof to knee.

Suddenly I remember the word in Cree for "ribs" and realize my mistake of a few days ago.

It is too late now to say anything. Furthermore, the kettle contains other legs—in fact, nothing but legs.

After all, pigs' feet are considered a delicacy. Why shouldn't reindeer feet and legs be the same?

Everyone gets his portion and starts eating. The legs are good, well boiled and tender. But the cooks, for some reason or other, have not bothered to skin each long thin shank, and the whole kettle is a mass of floating brown and gray hairs.

Hungry as I am, I stop a second and look around. Everyone seems most unconcerned. I have to follow suit. But while I eat—I mean gnaw at the flesh around the bone—I feel a thick mustachio of caribou hair settling all around my mouth like fresh paint.

—Twenty-fifth of April. The winter is nearly over. Although the rivers and lakes remain frozen, the snow on land is melting. Two days ago I heard for the first time the gurgling of a little creek somewhere in the bush. This morning, at dawn, I saw two sheldrakes flying over the tree tops.

The geese will be coming soon, and their honking will trumpet, all over the land, the news that spring at last is here.

I have been fairly successful with my trading. Kasimir's band gave me rather a lot of fur. Skin by skin, hour after hour, day after day, I have been able to secure a good part of their hunt. Six times have I had to journey back and forth from my post to their camp. I am glad that this part of the job is over now.

I have sent the furs south to McL..., neatly bundled up in waterproof sheets, in the care of two Indians who were going over there to visit some relatives.

The North is a strange country. The natives will try to cheat you at any time. They will borrow and never repay. They will attempt to change skins on you, to give you the wrong number of pelts, to fool you on the weight of the flour, sugar, tea, tobacco, shot, which they are receiving from you in exchange for their furs.

But when it comes to plain robbery, that crime is unknown here. One can just as well entrust an Indian with thousands of dollars' worth of furs to transport from one place to another as one can leave one's watch hanging in a portage from the branch of a tree. Neither fur nor watch will ever be stolen.

I have left my outpost and I am camped now two hundred miles to the southwest, with a big band of Crees who are still hunting beaver, muskrat, and otter. McL... sent me a nice new outfit of trading goods and I have pitched my tent a few hundred yards from the Indian tepees. I have been here twenty days and I know everyone in the tribe. The men are all away in the bush and only return for two or three days at the end of each week.

The squaws are friendly, and each one feeds me in turn one meal. It's a great thing for me, as I needn't cook my own food, except coffee in the morning when I

get up. I never know each day who is going to be my hostess, but toward noon and six o'clock I sit expectantly in front of my tent. Suddenly one of the squaws comes out of her tepee and shrieks, "*Mitsoo!* (Food!)" That's my signal. I promptly go to that tent and eat whatever is prepared, generally whitefish, sometimes caribou, often porcupine, which I detest. I always take with me the dessert, more often prunes, sometimes jam or honey, and of course a handful of tea, always.

My work, "trading," starts as soon as the men return. But when they are away time hangs heavily on my hands.

I have struck up a great friendship with a little boy about nine years old. I call him "Papoose," but his real name is David Butterfly. I am not prepared to explain exactly how he happens to have such a family name. I suppose it is a direct translation of the native language by some local trader. But his Christian name is certainly of "the Clergyman's choosing"—the Clergyman who lives at the big fur-trading village where the Mission is, three hundred miles away.

Papoose's parents, although they do not speak a word of English, are Protestant Methodists. I mean by that that they selected years ago, for private or business reasons of their own, to enter that fold instead of surrendering to the Roman Catholic competitor who also runs a Mission in the same locality.

Papoose is the only boy of the family. His parents love him with the fierce love of the Northern Indians, to whom, as in the Far East, the male child is the only thing that counts.

To be truthful, I am, afraid that he is utterly spoiled, and his manners are atrocious. But he is very useful to me.

First, he keeps me posted on everything that goes on, especially as far as the quantities of fur brought into the camp are concerned. I have of course to bribe him heavily for that, with sweets, tobacco, jam, pocket-knives, and what not.

Secondly, he keeps me company, during the long weary hours of waiting for the hunters' return.

To look at, Papoose is quite out of the ordinary.

He is a thin, long-legged little human animal, with the healthy purple-brown complexion of the Canadian savage. His coarse black hair rests like a round cap on the top of his skull, his last "haircut" having been accomplished by his mother, with a pair of straight shears, all along the edges of a kettle clapped beforehand on his head.

His eyes are really enormous, velvety black, and as sharp as needles, but they are always half screened by drooping eyelids which slant away on each side of his face, right back to his ears.

He wears a pair of soiled canvas trousers, reaching

halfway down to his ankles, sustained by a leather string which starts from his right hip, reaches across his chest over his left shoulder, and finds a final hold somewhere behind in the centre of his loins.

His shirt, made out of an old caribou skin, is torn open at the neck, while his feet are shod with real moose-hide moccasins.

He always wears on his wrists a pair of thin bracelets, in leather and beads, interwoven with small porcupine quills—which look exactly like a pair of multicolored handcuffs without chains.

Papoose smokes a pipe, like a man, and when he does not he wears it thrust, bowl upward, in a slit in his shirt, on the left side of his chest.

When he smokes he spits, and his skill at spitting is just short of miraculous. He never moves his head one way or another—and his aim is unerring.

He dearly loves dog fights and I have caught him several times coaxing two huskies to come to grips by rubbing their noses against one another.

His great joy in life is to shoot, at anything, with a bow and blunt-head arrows. As in spitting, his skill is amazing. Inside of forty feet he can hit anything he aims at, including your tent guide rope and the small knob on the lid of your kettle when the latter is boiling merrily over the camp fire.

Another favorite pastime of his is to throw a short axe,

holding it by the handle, at a given target. As long as he is aiming at something large and consistent, such as the trunk of a tree, I don't see much harm in the game. But when he tries to hit the snow birds in camp, especially when the latter are hopping on the ground in close proximity to my tent, I cannot help feeling a bit nervous.

He knows and can imitate the call of any wild animal. His masterpiece is the laugh of the loon, but he can honk a flock of geese three miles out of their course.

Papoose doesn't know how to read or write, even in Cree, but his sense of location is uncanny. The north is stamped in his brain wherever he is. Blindfold him, twirl him around for a minute, stop him, and ask him where the north is. Invariably his hand will point "true north." I have never known that experiment to fail.

He has traveled this year alone, either in a hunting canoe or on foot in winter, twenty miles from any camp which his family has pitched. He is nine years old, mind you! Nobody here seems to think it very remarkable.

He loves to sing, all to himself. Funny Indian songs—half Cree, half Chipewayan. I have listened to him an hour at a time, but I can't make out what the whole thing is about. I can only catch a word now and then. There is no tune to speak of—just a plaintive singsong which never seems to end. But now and then he strikes a high note and his whole little self seems to give way to it. He sways back and forth, beats the air up and

down with the palms of his hands, and keeps up the note until his very breath stops.

In the pitch-darkness of a winter night, right under the northern lights shivering in the sky, on the edge of a camp fire shooting weird thin sharp shadows across the snow, his little Indian song grips and scares your heart.

—Fifteenth of June. For two weeks I have been traveling south, transporting my precious bundles of fur by canoe.

Tonight is my last camp. I pitched it after sunset, a few miles from the line. Tomorrow I shall have reached civilization again. At last!

As I write these lines on my knees, close to the glimmering flames of the fire, I can hear nothing, not even the sighing of the breeze in the poplars above my head, while the river, at my feet, flows without a murmur, shining in places where the light of the full moon touches it through the trees.

For eight months I have listened each night to the utter silence of the North, sometimes in awe, often in dread.

But tonight I wonder at myself, for here, at the end of the long, long trail, I find myself listening and listening to it, with a feeling of regret; more than that—with a pang in my heart which must be love. My whole being seems to crave that peace and quiet against which I have been fighting unconsciously.

Just at this moment, suddenly, a long wailing screech shatters the night. It comes from the south, far away. Startled, I look up toward the tree tops, across the river. Angrily I strain my ears. Here it comes again, twice in succession, followed a second later by a last short blast.

I recognize the sound in disgust. It is an engine whistling on the railway track, a few miles away.

WHEN THE CARIBOU FAILED

SEVEN DOGS! ALL PURE HUSKIES!

VII

"CRACK!" went the whip. The sharp report tore the frozen stillness of the Barren Lands. A little white puff rose from the hard snow, showing where the end of the walrus-hide lash had harmlessly landed. The long low sleigh quivered and plunged forward, while the team of dogs, crouching low, dug their claws frantically in the ice of the lake and strained in their harness for more speed.

Seven dogs! All pure huskies! When I close my eyes I can see them now, after all these years.

A black and white leader. He always ran with his head turned back over his shoulder, watching the driver, when the man wasn't breaking trail ahead. Then three brindles, all brothers, silent like wolves. Behind them a little white bitch, with one yellow spot on the right cheek. She was the best dog for her size I have ever known, but she had the bad habit of whining, sharp, eager little whines, each time she had to tug a little harder at her breastplate. After that, a roan, a rare color, like a blue fox. He was sulky and treacherous,

always apt to bite the dog in front of him if he could reach him. And, last of all, an old seasoned traveler of five years, pure gray, who knew every trick of the game and always howled to the skies when he felt a blizzard coming. He was my special pet in camp.

Yes, it was a great team, the best I think I have ever had, and that day my guide and I were urging them for all they were worth.

The long bleak frozen lake stretched due north. We could already make out the end of it, through the haze, the vague outline of rocky hills, wind-swept, desolate, snow patches in the hollows gleaming white against the gray of the stone.

It was in the dead of winter, and the cold was terrific. There was no trail. We were traveling close to the shore, on the glare ice, walking or running behind the sleigh. A light breeze was blowing from the west in uneven gusts. And when those gusts came, the little rifts of snow would curl up suddenly like wisps of white smoke, lashing our left cheek and making us turn away in an agony of pain. Meanwhile the dogs shrank also, veering toward land, until a crack of the whip straightened them out on their course.

It was noon, I remember. We were looking for a small band of inland Eskimos, led by an old man called Kakarmik. He was supposed to be trapping somewhere at the end of the lake and we had to find out if all was

well with his people. He was new to the district and we wanted to meet him and tell him where he could trade in his furs next spring.

Mile after mile went by. Then a rope on the sleigh snapped, a small part of the load slipping off. While we repaired the accident, we noticed that three of the dogs, instead of lying down and resting curled up with their backs to the wind, remained standing, looking ahead and sniffing high in the air.

Climbing on the top of the load, I searched the end of the lake with my glasses and picked out a small dark speck which was moving. It was a man, the first one we had seen since we had started traveling twenty days ago, and in the utter desolation of that frozen desert the sight of the tiny, living dot seemed to fill the horizon with color and movement.

Half an hour later we were in plain sight of the whole band of Eskimos. The igloos were built on a rocky point, while the entire tribe seemed to be scattered a mile or so out on the ice.

"Fishing," was our thought, and at once we knew that our friends were in a bad way. No Eskimo fishes inland through the ice in winter unless he has missed the herds of caribou in the fall and has been unable to stock up with meat and fat until the next spring.

"Starving," was my guide's curt remark a few minutes later.

Then, three men who had been watching us with their small telescopes started running toward our sleigh. They still had their fish spears in their hands. We stopped our team and looked at each other thoughtfully. We were not frightened of the Eskimos, for we knew them well. But starving men in the Barren Lands are not easily handled at times, and our precious stock of food, with our seven dogs, might have proved too much of a temptation.

We had a rifle with us, but the thought of showing it never entered our minds. In the North neither white men nor red men ever use firearms except on game. The days of murder have long since gone, notwithstanding printed stories to the contrary. We simply waited, anxiously, wondering what would happen.

As soon as the first man arrived within earshot, he began calling out and waving. In a few seconds we understood his words. "Bad ice—look out—turn round—pass near the shore." With a few muttered words of relief, we slewed the excited team back in a wide circle and, obeying instructions, made our way past the igloos on the point to where all the Eskimos were standing.

Kakarmik, the old chief, was the first to greet us. Then we had to shake hands with everyone, man, woman, and child, even the babies in their mothers' hoods—a tedious job when it is forty degrees below and one must keep one's double fur mitts on. After that, as

quickly as possible, my guide explained who we were, from where we came, when we had to go back, and the reason for our trip.

Kakarmik thanked us for our visit. His description of local conditions was exactly what we had guessed at first.

Being new to the district, the band had reached too late the place where the caribou cross the river in tens of thousands on their migration south, and had only been able to spear a few stragglers. After that they had spent weary weeks scouring the country in vain for smaller herds. Winter settling down in earnest, Kakarmik had finally decided to camp at the end of the lake where the water was shallow and the ice thin because of the current of the mighty river flowing from there down to the Arctic Ocean. His only solution was to fish, and, since he had no nets, to spear through holes in the ice, where the men, crouching behind a small windshield, watched all day long.

The fishing had been good at first. But now it was poor, very poor. When a man caught four fish of three or four pounds every twenty-four hours, he could consider himself very lucky. They had only four spears to feed seventeen people. He didn't count the small babies at the breast. Half of them had already died, and he expected the rest to go soon. They had no dogs. They had eaten them all. They were going to stay here another week, in the hope that the fishing would improve. But,

if it did not, then he would leave for a certain lake he knew, twelve days' walking to the northwest. There he thought he might perhaps find musk ox.

Yes, they had three rifles and enough ammunition. He knew the risk he would have to take. In fact, he expected that half the band—even more—would fall on the way, but he would take the chance if the fish were going to fail entirely. And, did we have food, over and above what we needed for our return trip—twenty days?

The guide and I looked at each other. There stood a band of Eskimos on the point of sheer, complete starvation. Numbering seventeen to the two of us, still they made no move to seize our food and our dogs. Obeying the eternal law of the North, they took it for granted that we had to keep our team so as to be able to travel back south to wherever we lived, and enough food, so much per man and per dog, per day, to last the distance we had to cover. They simply asked us if we had, by any chance, a surplus of food. Without hesitation we unpacked our whole outfit and laid out our complete stock on the ice.

While a woman kept our dogs quiet under the threat of the whip, we sorted out and counted the dog food, fish, then our own caribou meat. Traveling north of the trees, we had only a little gasoline stove, to boil our tea. The meat we ate raw, trusting to be able to last on it until we found our cache on our way back, at the trees,

where wood and fire would enable us to cook again and eat pork and beans and flour cakes.

Twenty days of traveling! Seven dogs! Three fish per dog per day. They were very small fish. That meant four hundred and twenty fish. We found that we actually had four hundred and fifty. We put the balance of thirty aside. Then we cut down the dog allowance to two fish a day, thus adding one hundred and forty fish to the thirty. As far as our own meat was concerned, we gave them forty pounds of it, keeping eighty for ourselves. We offered them tea, but they refused it, as they had no fat to use with moss for fuel in their little stone lamps.

Kakarmik distributed the fish and meat there and then, so much per head, and in a few minutes every Eskimo had gone to the igloos to eat.

As we turned south, after saying good-bye to the old chief, we noticed a young woman standing a few hundred yards ahead of us. When we got up to her, she beckoned and we stopped. She was very thin and very, very weak. She told us that she was an orphan from another tribe and, having been taken up through charity and having absolutely no relations, she was not receiving her proper share of the daily catch. Therefore she was starving, and she begged us for one fish,—one fish from our dog food,—just one, for her alone, adding that she would eat it at once, there on the ice, before the others found her and took it away from her.

She was very pathetic, with her thin face all blackened with frostbite, and she made little pleading gestures with her hands in her anxiety to make us understand that she was dying on her feet from hunger.

We took a fish out of the bag. I chose it carefully. It was a whitefish, weighing about three pounds, very fat, and frozen, of course, as hard as a piece of granite. When I handed it to the girl I could see her trembling with excitement. One of her legs, in the big caribou trouser and boot, started shaking so badly that she nearly pitched forward on the sleigh, and the saliva began to drip from the corner of her mouth, freezing when it reached her chin.

As soon as she had the fish in her arms she tried to bite a piece out of it. But her teeth failed her. The guide gave her our little axe. Putting the fish down on the ice, she tried to chop it in pieces, but she was too weak and she missed it. The man had to cut it up for her. And then it was an awful sight to watch her gobble the chunks and swallow them whole, hardly munching. When she had eaten a large portion, she gathered the remains and hid them in her clothing, against her bare skin, where they would thaw and where she could reach them easily, without attracting attention.

When we turned round to have a last look at the igloos, she was halfway back to the shore. She had stopped walking, and was sitting on the ice, facing us.

As we waved at her she did not make a sign, but she bent her head down to her chest. I suppose she was having another mouthful of fish before getting back to the others.

And during the twenty days of our trip south, to the trees and our fur outpost, every night when my guide and I lay side by side in the same fur bag, under the little canvas tent, we both pondered over the fate of Kakarmik's tribe, while the face of the starving woman haunted our dreams as soon as we fell asleep.

II

Six months later I returned to the Barren Lands, in the same district. I was traveling by canoe with two Indians. My guide of the winter was somewhere north of me and I had arranged to meet him at the northern end of the lake where I had seen Kakarmik and his band in January.

Leisurely I proceeded on my way north. It was toward the end of July and the bleak rugged country had changed into summer garb. No more snow—a few patches of greenish moss and stunted willows scattered about between the gray rocks. No more ice—but miles and miles of sapphire-blue water. Hundreds and thousands of caribou plodding north, keeping high on the crest of the hills, seeking the wind so as to avoid the black flies. White gulls soaring aimlessly about the lake.

Ducks and geese flying back and forth over their nesting grounds. White foxes—invisible—barking defiantly somewhere in the rocks. Thousands of small birds twittering and flitting about their nests on the ground. And proud piebald cock ptarmigans drumming and crowing everywhere, perched on the stones all along the shore line.

I pitched my camp at last on the same point where I had seen the igloos seven months before. Not a sign of life anywhere. And there I waited a whole week before my guide arrived. My thoughts at all times were with Kakarmik and his small band of Eskimos. No one, south, had received any news of them since I had last met the tribe in the dead of winter.

Had they been able to ward off starvation where I had seen them until the first caribou had returned in the spring? Or had they risked the big adventure and faced death in their search for musk ox, away, far away, somewhere on the shores of the big lake unknown to all of us but Kakarmik?

For a whole week I pondered, and then suddenly, from far out on the lake, just before sunset, I saw my man coming from the northwest in a canoe manned by three Eskimos.

It was a beautiful evening, such as one sees so often in the far North during the summer. The horizon was blood red. The canoe, silhouetted in black across the

flaming background, glided through waters as still as a mirror and of all the hues of the rainbow. The regular splash of the paddles woke the echoes of the hills behind me, while the scattered drops of water fell back on the surface of the lake, around the canoe, like tongues of fire.

Silently I watched the four men coming nearer and nearer until the bow of the canoe grinded softly on the sand beach and remained still.

The guide walked up the bank. So did the Eskimos. They belonged to a band from the east and I knew them well. We all shook hands, silently. Such is the way men greet one another in the wilderness.

After a few seconds, when the white man had found a flat stone to sit on, and lit his pipe, carefully and slowly, I looked at him. "Well." He knew what I meant. He took the pipe out of his mouth and turned the bowl slowly in his hand, gazing at it thoughtfully. Then, moving sidewise, his eyes found mine. "All dead," he answered, and after that, a second or so later, as an afterthought, "I found them all."

Although I expected the news in a way, his few terse words stunned me and I remained silent. Meanwhile the three Eskimos, who guessed what had been said in English, remained squatting in front of me, watching my face with unscrutable half-closed eyes.

Finally I asked what had happened, and this was the story I heard.

That spring, before the ice had left the lake, my man had returned to the very spot where we had last seen Kakarmik. The igloos were still there, but the camp was deserted. There were no fresh signs. One could see at a glance that the Eskimos had gone away months before. He decided to travel northwest, toward the other lake that the old chief had told us about. He took the three eastern Eskimos with him and first crossed the lake he was on. For half a day they all searched for tracks on the shore, as they had to find out exactly where Kakarmik and his band had started their walk inland. Then they found sure signs. First a bunch of traps, then a skin bundle of extra caribou blankets, finally a grave—just a few small stones scattered over the body of a very small child.

From the lay of the land it was easy after that to guess that the band of Eskimos must have taken a sort of coulee, like a small valley, winding its way more or less northwest. My guide took a chance and started walking up that trail. There were no tracks on the ground, as the thin snow had been swept away by the wind or had melted under the first rays of the sun. For a whole day the four men did not see anything that could make them believe that they were on the right trail. Then, all at once, they began finding things—a fish spear, a telescope, an axe, a snow knife, two pairs of boots.

Not only did they know then that they were on the

right track, but they soon guessed what had happened. The weak, straggling band of starving natives had begun there to discard all extra weight. A little later they came across, in a hollow, a half-melted ice screen, like a portion of an igloo wall. There the Eskimos must have huddled together and slept during the first night. A mile farther the white man, walking ahead, found the body of a woman, still half frozen, untouched by any preying animal. The three Eskimos recognized her and named her at once. It was the girl to whom we had given the one fish.

From there on the trail was strewn with every loose article the band had been carrying. It was easy to see that the pace had begun to tell and that the dying natives had decided to throw away everything they had except the rifles. After that, during seven weary days, my man followed the trail by the dead bodies. Generally one alone; sometimes two, side by side; once three, sitting in a group, close to one another behind a rock.

They counted the dead carefully. The band consisted of seventeen souls originally, not including the babies. Kakarmik seven months ago had told us seventeen, meaning from the youngest child who could walk, without being carried at any time, up to himself.

Well, they finally found the old man. He seemed to have been the last to fall. He was lying on his face, halfway up a little slope, but he had no rifle beside him.

They searched around for a long time, but did not find it, although the two other firearms had been accounted for with the two last bodies.

It was then that the three Eskimos told my man that Kakarmik's body was the sixteenth and that someone was still missing. The guide checked up carefully and came to the conclusion that they were right; but although the Eskimos knew each one of Kakarmik's band, they did not seem to be able to name the seventeenth.

The four men decided to go on toward the lake. For five hours they walked without finding anything—and then, just as they were going to give up, they came across the last body.

It was a girl—a little girl of twelve or thereabouts. The three Eskimos remembered her name. And right alongside of her body there lay the third rifle, with a small bag of cartridges.

III

That is the story my man told me. The sun had gone down before he stopped talking and it was past midnight. There wasn't a breath of wind on the lake. Right above, the northern lights shimmered and danced in the sky.

I left the four men without a word and went to my tent. I was tired, suddenly, so tired that I could hardly lift my feet from the ground. I lay down in my blankets

and closed my eyes. But I couldn't sleep. I never slept during the whole night. I just lay there, opening my eyes now and then to stare at the gray silk roof over my head.

I expected a tragedy. Starvation, after all, is a common occurrence in the far North. I was prepared for it, in a way, the very minute I said good-bye to Kakarmik during the winter. My man's report was no more tragic than many stories I had heard before, elsewhere, north of 63. My thoughts, in fact, did not even dwell on Kakarmik himself, nor on the young woman whom we had saved seven months before with the one fish from our dog food.

What haunted me was the thought of the little girl, the last one to survive—then to die, all alone.

The little girl of twelve, who managed to keep up until the very end because her mother probably had fed her with hidden scraps before she herself fell dead on the trail.

The little girl who saw the other members of the tribe sink one by one and die on the frozen land.

The little girl left all alone, hundreds of miles from anywhere, in a strange desert of ice and snow, with nothing but a sense of direction inherited from the old chief.

The little girl who never thought of giving in, even then, but who grasped the last rifle and went on and on,

blindly, in the deathly Arctic winter,—on and on,—true to the right direction followed by her elders,—on and on,—with the unfailing courage of her race, until death, at last, mercifully struck her down.

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